



וְלָמָּה
מָהְרָה יִשְׂרָאֵל
לְפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְלָמָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל
לְפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

Judges 5: 20

They
fought from the heavens
The stars fought from their
courses against
Sisera.

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Artwork by Douglas Kallerson

Judges 5:13-23 **(The Song of Deborah, Part III)**

Some of the words, clauses, and verses of this section are extremely complicated. In addition, there are knotty words, complex structures, difficult thoughts to be expressed, etc. Despite that, there are also obvious points that stand above the complicated details. One of them is indecision. It is true that people can sometimes be overly decisive and wind up in a pickle from acting too hastily.

Conversely, some have a knack for making the right decision at the right time and following through with it for the best results. They do it consistently and they get ahead in life.

As for the inaction just mentioned, some may think about doing something to the point that what is considered is eventually overcome by other events. Admittedly, that describes me in many ways. However, the Lord has put a wonderful wife and great friends in my path to spur me along before it's too late for some opportunities.

There are others who will never come to a decision about anything, even with prompting by those who know exactly what to do, how to do it, etc.

Sometimes we don't act because we just don't want to get involved. We know that it is right to do so, and yet we stay put and go about life as we see fit. Several types of inaction are seen in our verses today. One can see the frustration in Deborah's words as she pours out her complaints to the people because of it.

Text Verse: *"To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven." Ecclesiastes 3:1*

In his list of things that there is a time for, Solomon says that there is a time for war and a time for peace. Here, the people of Israel were called to war. Some responded to the call and some did not. Those who responded are commemorated to this day in the pages of Scripture.

They are the heroes of old who heard and obeyed the call of the Lord. There are those who failed to heed the call and they are remembered in a different way. If my thoughts are right on one of the verses, it is actually laughable how they are remembered. I think you will agree.

I have personally talked to people about Jesus who simply couldn't decide what to do. Heaven's doors were opened right before them, but they were so stuck in the world that they wouldn't commit to entering through them. I hope their indecision is over and they have decided to walk through that open door, but that is ultimately their choice.

But for those of us who know the Lord, we still have choices to make about the calling of the Lord. How will we live it out? Israel was given a calling as the Lord's people. They were to live out that calling in a manner that was appropriate.

In the case of times of war, they were to trust the Lord, respond to the call, and join with those on their way to the battle. Deborah's words in these verses will speak of those who lived in a manner worthy of their calling contrasted with those who idled their time away, not acting in accord with the word of the Lord.

Let us think about our lives as believers and learn the lesson of Israel and those within the nation who are remembered according to their deeds. Their deeds were ultimately based on their faith or lack of faith in the Lord. It's all to be found in His superior word. And so, let us turn to that precious word once again, and... May God speak to us through His word today, and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. Great Searchings of Heart (verses 13-18)

The first verse of today's passage is probably as difficult as any so far in Scripture. This is not only in translation, but in how to translate. For example, depending on how it is pointed, the word translated as "came down" (*yarad*) is spelled the same as the word for "rule," (*radah*) ירד.

The Greek translates it as "came down," but the Masoretic Text went with the more difficult "rule." Therefore, two completely different translations will result. The difficulty begins there because of the highly complicated structure of the words.

Therefore, once one decides on which word, descend or rule, is correct, there are still innumerable possibilities of where to divide the words and how to render them.

¹³ **"Then the survivors came down, the people against the nobles;
The Lord came down for me against the mighty.**

az yerad sarid l'adirim am Yehovah yerad li ba'giborim

It is not sure where to divide the words –

Then ruled (or descended) remnant to majesties people
Yehovah ruled (or descended) to me in the mighties

or...

Then ruled (or descended) remnant to majesties
People Yehovah ruled (or descended) to me in the mighties

From this most basic translation, the intent must be determined and then explained with accompanying words for it to make any meaningful sense. For example, if the word *radah*, to rule, is decided upon, then it is causative –

Then He caused a remnant to rule against the nobles of the people.
Yehovah caused me to rule among the warriors.

This has given a brief snapshot of the difficulty of the words. We could explore them for an hour without coming to a proper resolution. Therefore, I will use the pointing of the Masoretic Text, just to give you an analysis.

Then rule remnant to majesties people.

This translation is assuming all that we have looked at, and a great deal more. The word remnant is not referring to just a handful of people as it often does. In this case, it is referring to those who entered the battle. Not all of the tribes fought in the battle. Those who did engage were considered a remnant of Israel.

As such they are poetically said to be given rule among the greatest and most majestic of the people. They are the heroes of the song. In parallel to that Deborah next says...

Yehovah rule to me in the mighties.

Because she is Israel's judge, both accompanying and inspiring the warriors going into battle, Deborah is poetically said to be given rule among the great, the mighties, of the people. To paraphrase how I believe the words should be rendered, the verse says –

At that time, He made the remnant to rule among the most majestic,
Yehovah made me rule among the mightiest.

However, if you want to compare the variations of about fifty translations to see how markedly different some of them are, go to [this link](#).

As I translated it, the words form an a/a parallel between those who engaged the battle and Deborah who was a participant in the events: *az yerad sarid l'adirim am Yehovah yerad li ba'giborim* –

- (a) Then rule remnant to majesties people,
- (a) Yehovah rule to me in the mighties.

Of the words of this verse, I defer to the comments of the translators of the King James Version in their preface –

“Therefore as S. Augustine saith, that variety of Translations is profitable for the finding out of the sense of the Scriptures: ... so diversity of signification and sense in the margin, where the text is not so clear, must needs do good, yea, is necessary, as we are persuaded.”

In other words, in the case of such a difficult verse, it is profitable to read many translations to hopefully get the proper sense of the words. This is profitable. Also, read the margin comments (or footnotes) because the text is not so clear. With that, Deborah continues...

¹⁴ **From Ephraim were those whose roots were in Amalek.**

**After you, Benjamin, with your peoples,
From Machir rulers came down,
And from Zebulun those who bear the recruiter’s staff.**

*mini ephrayim sharsham ba’amaleq akharekha Binyamin ba’amamekha mini makhir yaredu
m’khoqqim u-mizvulun b’shevet sopher*

From Ephraim, their root in Amalek

Again, it isn’t certain what is being referred to. What seems likely is that Ephraim settled in the land where Amalek had settled. Although they were settled in many places, a particular designation of one of their dwellings is made in Judges 12:15 –

“And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mount of the Amalekites.”

Therefore, warriors came out for the battle from the area where Amalek was. The term “their root” speaks of where they themselves were planted by the Lord.

After you, Benjamin, in your peoples

The words here can mean one of two things. The first is that Benjamin came after Ephraim to join the battle. Hence, it would be “From Ephraim came this group. After you, Ephraim, came Benjamin to join your peoples.”

Or it could be saying that Benjamin has the preeminence. “From Ephraim came this group, but they came after you, O Benjamin, in the number of your people.” Either way, Benjamin assisted in the call to arms and join in the battle against Sisera. Next...

From Machir descended inscribers

The same word used in Judges 5:9 is used here, *khaqqaq*. It signifies to cut in, inscribe, etc. Thus, it is one who makes a decree, as in a lawgiver or a sovereign authority within a group, such as a clan.

Machir was the only son of Manasseh. His descendants settled on both sides of the Jordan, but those on the west side are being referred to. The meaning is that the clan leaders of western Manasseh came down to the battle. The implication is that they led the people of Manasseh under them so that the tribe was well represented. After that, it next says...

And from Zebulun, drawers in rod, counter

Zebulun is likewise represented. The word *mashak* means to draw or drag. The rod is a symbol of either authority or it represents a tribe. The word *saphar* means to count. Here it is used to describe what the person does, and so many translations will make it a noun, such as scribe –

“Zadok the son of Ahitub and Abimelech the son of Abiathar *were* the priests;
Shavsha *was* the scribe [*saphar*, counter].” 1 Chronicles 18:16

In the case of what Deborah is saying, this is the one who would number the people for battle. It may even extend to a recruiting officer, such as in 2 King 25 –

“He also took out of the city an officer who had charge of the men of war, five men of the king’s close associates who were found in the city, the chief recruiting officer [*ha’sopher*, the counter] of the army, who mustered the people of the land, and sixty men of the people of the land *who were* found in the city.”

-2 Kings 25:19

Therefore, the verse is poetically referring to those who responded from these four tribes. It forms an a/a b/b pattern: *mini ephrayim sharsham ba’amaleq akharekha Binyamin ba’amamekha mini makhir yaredu m’khoqqim u-mizvulun b’shevet sopher –*

- (a) From Ephraim, their root in Amalek.
- (a) After you, Benjamin, in your peoples.
- (b) From Machir descended inscribers,
- (b) And from Zebulun, drawers in rod, counter.

¹⁵ **And the princes of Issachar *were* with Deborah;**

As Issachar, so *was* Barak

Sent into the valley under his command;

Among the divisions of Reuben

***There were* great resolves of heart.**

v’saray b’yisas’khar im d’vorah v’yisas’khar ken baraq ba’emeq shulakh b’raglav biphлагоth reuven gedolim khiqe lev

And my commanders in Issachar with Deborah.

The word *sar* is used. It signifies a commander, a prince, a ruler, etc. In Isaiah 9, the Messiah is called *sar shalom*, or Prince of peace. The commanders of the people of Issachar accompanied Deborah. But more, though not translated this way by any Bible, the word is commonly accepted as first person singular. Thus, “my commanders.”

Keil disagrees and says, “...‘my princes,’ does not furnish any appropriate meaning, as neither Deborah nor Barak was of the tribe of Issachar, and it is not stated anywhere that the Issacharites gathered round Deborah as their leaders. The reading שרי (stat. constr.), adopted by the old versions, must be taken as the correct one, and the introduction of the preposition ך does not preclude this.”

First, how does Keil know where Deborah was from? Just because she judged between Bethel and Ramah in mount Ephraim, it doesn’t mean she isn’t from Issachar. But even if she wasn’t, saying, “my commanders” could simply be a way of showing pride in Issachar’s commanders in the army she had called to battle through Barak.

Further, repeating her own name in the words doesn’t negate this at all. Rather, it would add to the poetic nature of the words. Render “my commanders” and ignore Keil. As for naming the commanders, the implication is that there were troops under them. Thus, Issachar was well-represented. Further...

And Issachar, so Barak.

The words mean that even as Issachar sent in commanders to lead the battle with troops under them, Barak was also a leader among the people. Next, it notes he led them...

In the valley, sent in his feet.

The words first note that he was “in the valley.” The *emeq* signifies depth. Therefore, it is a broad depression. That is followed with the same term as Judges 4:10, *b’raglav*, or “in his feet.” It is as if he is leading and the men are following his steps, being in submission to him. Deborah is reveling in leading the people who then lead their troops into battle. With that, a contrast is seen in the next words...

In divisions Reuben.

Here is a new word to Scripture, *pelugah*. It will only be seen here, in the next verse, and in 2 Chronicles 35. It comes from *palag*, to split, or divide. Thus it is a section or division of the tribe. Its other use helps get the sense of the meaning –

“And stand in the holy *place* according to the divisions [*pelugah*] of the fathers’ houses of your brethren the *lay* people, and *according to* the division of the father’s house of the Levites.” 2 Chronicles 35:5

As a side note, instead of divisions, some translations say streams or watercourses. The reason for this is a similar word, *palagah*, is found in Job 20:17 where it speaks of streams and rivers. Obviously, rivers divide the land and so this is where the meaning meets up. However, that doesn't hold up when considering that it would make no sense translating the other use of *pelugah* in 2 Chronicles as "streams."

As for Reuben, rather than joining in the battle, something else is noted...

Great resolutions heart.

Here is another new word, *kheqeq*. It is derived from *khoq*, a decree or statute. Therefore, this speaks of a decree, enactment, or resolution. Some translations say, "thoughts of the heart," but that doesn't seem to be strong enough. It is a thought that has been decided upon or which is being decided upon. Thus, it is a resolve or resolution.

Deborah implies that while the tribes she has named acted and resolved to go to battle, Reuben was trying to resolve the matter but coming to no resolution. Instead, he sat idle, whittling away the time, inwardly muttering out his mental machinations.

This state of Reuben is highlighted by the fact that its leaders are not even mentioned. It simply mentions the divisions of Israel, leaders and people, all just sitting there pondering what to do.

As for the structure, the second clause complements and builds upon the first. The third then explains the first two. The fourth clause introduces the contrast, while the fifth explains it:
v'saray b'yisas'khar im d'vorah v'yisas'khar ken baraq ba'emeq shulakh b'raglav biphlagoth reuven gedolim khiqe lev –

- (a) And commanders in Issachar with Deborah
- (a) And Issachar, so Barak:
- (b) In the valley, sent in his feet
- (c) In divisions Reuben:
- (d) Great resolutions heart

¹⁶ **Why did you sit among the sheepfolds,
To hear the pipings for the flocks?
The divisions of Reuben have great searchings of heart.**

More difficult words to consider: *lamah yashavta ben ha'mishptayim lishmoa s'riqoth adarim liphlagoth reuven gedolim hiqre lev*

The translation of the first clause depends on the root of the main noun –

Why sit between the trivets.

It is actually unknown what the word *mishpethayim* means. Most just go with sheepfolds because of the next clause. It comes from one of two roots, *shaphah*, to sweep bare, or more likely *shaphath*, to set (on the fire, like a pot being set for cooking).

If the latter, it is assumed to be something like fireplaces or ash heaps. However, while considering the word and comparing it to the other two uses of the root verb *shaphath* which do not describe setting a pot (Psalm 22:15 & Isaiah 26:12), I believe this is more precisely referring to a trivet, on which pots are placed.

Thus, it is a firm base. That would match the other two uses of the root verb. The only other use of *mishpethayim* is in Genesis 49:14 which most people translate as either sheepfolds or burdens. However, if I analyzed the next clause properly, trivet makes sense to me...

Hearing hissings flocks.

The word *sheruqah* (or *sheriqah*) is first found here. It is only seen again in Jeremiah 18:16. It is a noun, coming from *sharaq* to hiss or whistle. Being a plural noun, it signifies hissings. The word *adarim* signifies flocks, herds, or droves. It is an arrangement or muster of animals, be it sheep, cattle, etc.

As sheep and goats bleat and cattle low, I don't think this is referring to the animals' front end, if you catch my drift. It says hissing. Hence, Deborah is picking on them for idling around fireplaces with trivets, listening to the flatulence of their animals.

Mind you, the words are so obscure that they could be referring to pretty much anything. Regardless, the intent can be understood from the next clauses...

To divisions Reuben.

This is the second use of *pelugah*. Saying divisions again appears to be the intent. The divisions of Reuben, sitting among their flocks seems proper. In Numbers 32, it said –

“Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of livestock; and when they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, that indeed the region *was* a place for livestock, ² the children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spoke to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the leaders of the congregation, saying, ³“Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Shebam, Nebo, and Beon, ⁴the country which the Lord defeated before the congregation of Israel, *is* a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock.” Numbers 32:1-4

Reuben associated itself with its livestock. Deborah is picking on them for sitting among the droves of livestock listening to them hiss. While sitting there, they had...

Great searchings heart.

Another new word, *kheqer*, or searchings, is introduced. It is etymologically connected to *kheqeq* seen in the previous verse. It signifies a thing to be searched out. Being plural, Reuben is idling away their time thinking about what to do. You can see the parallelism between the verses –

In divisions Reuben:
Great resolutions heart.

To divisions Reuben:
Great searchings heart.

They were trying to come up with a suitable resolution, but each time they did, they searched out another, unable to simply get up and act. Be advised, this verse is so complicated and widely translated, that whatever version you read, the meaning will be dubious. As for its structure, it is an a/a b/c where c explains b: *lamah yashavta ben ha'mishptayim lishmoa s'riqoth adarim liphlagoth reuven gedolim hiqre lev* –

- (a) Why sit between the trivets,
- (a) Hearing hissings flocks?
- (b) To divisions Reuben:
- (c) Great searchings heart.

The difficulty of these words again brings to mind the thoughts of the translators of the KJV –

“...it hath pleased God in his divine providence, here and there to scatter words and sentences of that difficulty and doubtfulness, not in doctrinal points that concern salvation.”

So far, within the Song of Deborah, this is certainly the case. In the next words, she continues to implicitly upbraid the tribes who did not participate in the battle...

**¹⁷ Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan,
And why did Dan remain on ships?
Asher continued at the seashore,
And stayed by his inlets.**

gilad b'ever ha'yarden shaken v'dan lamah yagur oniyoth asher yashav l'khoph yamim v'al miphratsav yishkon

Gilead in side the Jordan dwelt.

The word *b'ever*, or in side, can mean either side. It depends on the reference. In this case, it means that Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, whose inheritance was the land of the Gilead east of the Jordan remained in his inheritance and did not assist in the battle.

Manasseh was not unrepresented because Machir was noted in verse 14 as participating. Thus, to clarify the situation, Deborah defers to the name of the son, Gilead who dwelt in the Gilead.

And Dan, why sojourn ships?

Dan is along the Mediterranean Sea. Deborah's question could mean that Dan continued to ply his trade on ships, ignoring the call to battle, or that Dan fled to his ships in fear. The former seems more likely.

Dan just ignored the matter because it wasn't in their backyard. The affairs to the north didn't interest them so they took their ships out as usual, sojourning where their business took them. In this, Deborah is chiding them for caring more about their own business than the needs of the nation. Next...

Asher sat to coast seas.

Based on Asher's location, this is a disgrace. Asher lay on the northwest coast adjoining Zebulun and Naphtali. They were close enough to easily muster troops and join the battle, but they simply sat on the coast twiddling their thumbs. Deborah then repeats the sentiment as a second slap in the face...

And upon his breakings dwelt.

She uses another word that is found only here in Scripture, *miphrats*. It comes from *parats*, to break through. Thus, it is a break in the coastline because of a harbor, river, outcropping of rocks, etc. Her displeasure at the idleness of the tribe is seen in the use of "sat" as in idling away the time and "dwelt" as if he is permanently stuck there doing so.

It is an a/a/a/b pattern: *gilad b'ever ha'yarden shaken v'dan lamah yagur oniyoth asher yashav l'khoph yamim v'al miphratsav yishkon* –

- (a) Gilead in side the Jordan dwelt.
- (a) And Dan, why sojourn ships?
- (a) Asher sat to coast seas,
- (b) And upon his breakings dwelt.

¹⁸ **Zebulun is a people who jeopardized their lives to the point of death, Naphtali also, on the heights of the battlefield.**

z'vulun am khereph naphsho lamuth v'naphtali al m'rome sadeh

Zebulun people exposed his soul to death.

The word *kharaph* comes from a primitive root signifying “to pull off.” Thus, it is as if Zebulun stripped off his frail humanity and literally exposed his soul, that which animates the body, to death. This doesn’t mean that the soul dies. Rather the body dies leaving the soul in an unnatural state because the body it is joined to no longer lives.

The men of the tribe, stated in the singular “people” and “his soul” were united as one in the effort. It didn’t matter if they fought to the last person and the tribe died with them, they would fearlessly engage the enemy. Also...

And Naphtali upon heights field.

The words appear incomplete. But the thought is that Naphtali joined with Zebulun and Barak on Mount Tabor (Judges 4:6). When the time for battle was decreed, Naphtali was there, ready to expose his soul to death as well by descending to the open field of battle below.

The words are given to contrast the failings of those of Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Asher. By highlighting their failings, the resolve of Zebulun and Naphtali is deemed exceptional in her eyes.

The verse is a complementary a/a pattern where the main substance of the first clause is implied in the second: *z’vulun am khereph naphsho lamuth v’naphtali al m’rome sadeh –*

(a) Zebulun people exposed his soul to death.

(a) And Naphtali upon heights field.

*Who will walk worthy of the calling
By which we are called in Christ Jesus?
Don’t hesitate, shuffle your feet, or be stalling
Instead think on what He has done for us!*

*How can we not be faithful to respond
When Christ devotedly answered the call of His Father?
May our actions likewise correspond
Let us not treat our calling as an irritating bother*

*When the Lord instructs us to act
May we pay heed and do as He has said
His way is right and good, that’s a fact
Let us be faithfully obedient to our glorious Head*

II. Curse Meroz (verses 19-23)

¹⁹ **“The kings came *and* fought,
Then the kings of Canaan fought**

**In Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo;
They took no spoils of silver.**

bau m'lakhim nilkhamu az nilkhamu malkhe k'naan b'taanakh al me m'gido betsa keseph lo laqkhu

Came kings – fought.

The words are short and direct for effect. In this, she is essentially showing their readiness and military preparedness. They came to strike without any timidity. She then expands on the thought for greater effect...

Then, fought kings Canaan.

In Judges 4:2, it said that Jabin was king of Canaan who reigned in Hazor. It didn't call him "the king." Thus, he was one of many kings. Here, it notes kings in the plural. Therefore, the army of Sisera was either joined by confederate kings or with vassal kings who reigned under Jabin. Either way, it was a large contingent that entered into battle...

In Taanach, upon waters Megiddo.

This is the first time that Taanach is mentioned in relation to the battle. In Judges 1:27, it specifically noted that Manasseh failed to drive out the inhabitants of Taanach and its villages. Therefore, the people there would not likely side with Israel.

The meaning of Taanach is uncertain. Some think it is derived from an Egyptian word, while others think it is from an Arabic word. There is no corresponding root word found in Scripture. However, without explanation, Charles Ellicott says it means Sandy Soil.

Megiddo comes from *gadad*, to penetrate or cut. Hence it signifies Invading or Intruding. The waters of Megiddo are a poetic term for the river Kishon mentioned twice in Judges 4. Despite being readied for battle and in a favorable location...

Plunder silver – no took.

These kings and their army expected a rout and probably to continue on, defeating Israel throughout the land. However, the battle belonged to the Lord. Instead of plundering for silver, they got nothing except dead.

In a direct translation, one can see the straight, abrupt nature of the words, especially the first and last clauses that highlight the scene. It is an a/a b/c pattern: *bau m'lakhim nilkhamu az nilkhamu malkhe k'naan b'taanakh al me m'gido betsa keseph lo laqkhu*

- (a) Came kings – fought.
- (a) Then, fought kings Canaan.
- (b) In Taanach, upon waters Megiddo.
- (c) Plunder silver – no took.

Next, Deborah uses anthropomorphism to excite the minds of those who hear...

²⁰ **They fought from the heavens;
The stars from their courses fought against Sisera.**

min shamayim nilkhamu ha'kokhavim mimsilotam nilkhamu im sisra

From heavens – fought.

Again, the words are short and abrupt. They anticipate the words of the next clause to be completed. One must strip out the sensationalism from innumerable commentaries. Deborah is using anthropomorphism, nothing more. In this, she introduces a striking contrast to the kings of Canaan from the previous verse.

Came kings – fought.
From heavens – fought.

In both, the explanation is found in the subsequent words...

The stars from their highways fought with Sisera.

Obviously, stars do not fight. This is also not speaking of angels. The battle was fought by men, it was guided by the Lord, and Israel was victorious. Deborah is stating that the battle was so miraculous that it was as if God used the stars of the heavens to assist Israel.

Instead of keeping on their designated highways in the heavens, they departed from there, came down, and wiped out the enemy. The contrast is highlighted between the second clause of both verses –

Then, fought kings Canaan.
The stars from their highways fought with Sisera.

It is an a/a pattern where the second clause explains the first: *min shamayim nilkhamu ha'kokhavim mimsilotam nilkhamu im sisra*

- (a) From heavens – fought.
- (a) The stars from their highways fought with Sisera.

Again, Deborah next turns to nature to show that both the heavens and the earth were participants in the battle.

²¹ **The torrent of Kishon swept them away,
That ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon.
O my soul, march on in strength!**

nakhal qishon g'rapham nakhal q'dumim nakhal qishon tidr'khi naphshi oz

River Kishon swept them away.

The river, like the stars, is given the attributes of a warrior, as if it helped in the battle. It was Israel, by the guiding hand of the Lord, that defeated the enemy. But because the battle was so profound and the odds so obviously uneven, that it was as if the river actually took part, sweeping away the foe before them.

As for the name, Kishon comes from the verb *qush*, to lay bait or lure, thus, it means Snarer or Place of Snaring (or Ensnarement).

Another word found only here in Scripture is given, *garaph*. It signifies to sweep away. It comes from a primitive root meaning to bear off violently. It is as if the river reached out, grabbed the men, and carried them away as plunder.

What was probably the case is that the enemies were chased up to the river where they were slaughtered. Their bodies falling into the river would have then been swept away. Next, Deborah says...

River antiquities, river Kishon.

Again, another unique word is seen. It is a plural noun, *qedumim*, coming from the same as *qedem*, or east. But east in Scripture speaks of aforeside, the past, and even eternity itself as in Micah 5:2 when referring to the origins of the Messiah.

Being plural, it signifies ancient times or antiquities. The type of river is a *nakhal*, or torrent. That comes from the verb *nakhal*, to inherit. This is normally a river that doesn't flow all year, but only when the rains come. They then rush, often suddenly, through the land, inheriting it.

This may explain the plural word antiquities. Even though it doesn't always flow, it was carved out in the ancient past and has flowed innumerable times since creation. The words form their own type of pun – the enemy is the Inheritance of the Snarer.

Following this comes a short, abrupt, and difficult to pin down thought...

March my soul – strength.

Most translations heavily paraphrase what is said, trying to convey some type of meaning, but the short and abrupt nature of the words speaks for itself. As Ellicott says, “These sudden exclamations, which break the flow of the poem, add greatly to its fire and impetuosity.” That is the whole point.

Deborah is a female and did not directly participate in the battle. And yet, despite her gentler frame, she led the army to subdue a superior force. Therefore, she claims strength, expressed in the marching of her soul. This is probably affixed to the verse about the river to show that just as the river was swift and powerful, so is she because of her trust in the Lord.

The words form an a/a/b pattern: *nakhal qishon g'rapham nakhal q'dumim nakhal qishon tidr'khi naphshi oz*

- (a) River Kishon swept them away.
- (a) River antiquities, river Kishon.
- (b) March my soul – strength.

²² **Then the horses' hooves pounded,
The galloping, galloping of his steeds.**

Deborah continues to introduce new and rare words into Scripture: *az halemu iqve sus midaharoth daharoth abirav*

Then hammers heels horse.

The word *halam* is now brought in. It signifies to beat, hammer, strike down, etc. Some translations say that this indicates the breaking of the horses heels from being ridden too hard as they gallop. This is not what it means. The word indicates the action, not what happens from the action.

Deborah is describing what it was like during the battle, “At that time, the horses' hooves hammered.” With that, the source of the action, the hammering, is next described...

From gallopings – gallopings his mighties.

The noun is *daharah*, coming from *dahar* to rush or dash. As it is a horse, it indicates prancing or galloping, but it is plural - gallopings. Deborah uses a literary tool known as an anadiplosis, the repetition of a word or words to excite the mind. In this case, it is to convey the ongoing nature of the horse as it runs.

Using the plural noun form further stimulates the mind, bringing the hearer into the account. And more, the word *dahar* is a form of onomatopoeia – *dahar dahar dahar* as the horse runs. As such, the words are literally filled with the liveliness of the battle as the horse darts according to the reins of its master.

Lastly, she calls the horses *mighties* from another new word, *abir*, coming from the adjective *abir* which is used to poetically describe God as Mighty.

The words literally exude excitement and mental pictures making an a/a patten with a special repetition for effect: *az halemu iqve sus midaharoth daharoth abirav*

(a) Then hammers heels horse.

(a) From gallopings – gallopings his mighties.

With that, Deborah conveys her anger at those unwilling to participate...

**²³ ‘Curse Meroz,’ said the angel of the Lord,
‘Curse its inhabitants bitterly,
Because they did not come to the help of the Lord,
To the help of the Lord against the mighty.’**

Having spoken forth one anadiplosis, Deborah continues with that literary tool: *oru meroz amar malakh Yehovah oru aror yosh’veha ki lo bau l’eizrath Yehovah l’eizrath Yehovah ba’giborim*

Curse Meroz said messenger Yehovah.

The verb is imperative, “You are to curse Meroz.” This is the only time Meroz is mentioned in Scripture. It is undoubtedly referring to a city. Barnes says it was a village twelve miles from Samaria. The JFB commentary says that it was “on the confines of Issachar and Naphtali, which lay in the course of the fugitives.”

The NAS says the name is connected to the word *erez*, a cedar. But Abarim ties it to a Semitic verb *erez* – to withdraw or hide. If so, the m prefix signifies an agent or place of, and thus, Place of Withdrawing. Jones’ Dictionary simplifies that and says Refuge.

In other words, it appears that Meroz was close to the battlefield or on the trek of the flight of some of the warriors, probably providing a chance to hide and recuperate. This is speculation, but it may be that the name Meroz was given because of the events that took place. It also seems likely based on the last two clauses.

Next it says, “said messenger Yehovah.” There is no article before messenger and the verb curse is plural. Thus, it is referring to a human, not an angel. It is Deborah speaking of herself. She was wholly enraged at the conduct of Meroz for its conduct. And so...

Cursing curse her inhabitants.

The words are an imperative followed by an infinitive absolute. In essence, “You are to definitely be cursing her with a curse.” This city failed in its primary obligation of supporting Israel and was to be cursed by the people. This is because...

For no came to help Yehovah.

A city so close to the battle should have participated in it. But the meaning of the name adds its own emphasis. They didn't just fail by not coming to help in the battle, they were no help at all after the battle. They probably allowed those who fled to retreat right through their area. Their inaction was inexcusable.

Here, as always, the army of Israel and the power of the Lord are united as one. Referring to the same battle, it will often say both the Lord won the battle and that Israel fought the battle. That is the idea here. Meroz was unwilling to help Israel, and thus they were unwilling to help the Lord. For effect, she then repeats the matter...

To help Yehovah in the mighties.

A different word than that of verse 22 is translated as mighties. It speaks of one who is strong or mighty, such as warriors. The implication is that they had proven themselves anything but valiant warriors. Therefore, in her eyes, they were a city of sissies.

The words form a marvelous a/a b/b pattern filled with repetition: *oru meroz amar malakh Yehovah oru aror yosh'veha ki lo bau l'ezrath Yehovah l'ezrath Yehovah ba'giborim*

- (a) Curse Meroz said messenger Yehovah,
- (a) Cursing curse her inhabitants,
- (b) For no came to help Yehovah,
- (b) To help Yehovah in the mighties.

With these words, our verses for today are complete. But let us remember a lesson from these people and their interactions with the Lord. We are called with a calling that is irrevocable. But we are admonished to walk worthy of our calling.

Israel was called and they generally failed to walk worthy of it. At times, some in the nation did while others didn't. Sometimes a calling was made and a part of the people failed to respond. That happened with Meroz, and they received a curse.

In Judges 20, another calling will be made. In Judges 21, those who failed to respond will be struck with the sword. We are called to holy living. If we fail at that, we may reap the consequences of our actions. The way to keep from such things is to know the Lord through knowing His word.

In living according to what He says, things will go well with our souls, we will walk worthy of our calling, and we will receive rewards when we stand before His judgment seat. Let us, therefore, determine to walk worthy before Him all of our days.

Closing Verse: *“Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, ¹² that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

-2 Thessalonians 1:11, 12

Next Week: Judges 5:24-31 *Ay chihuahua... wonders galore!* The Song of Deborah, Part IV)
(16th Judges Sermon)

The Song of Deborah, Part III

13 Then rule remnant to majesties people,
Yehovah rule to me in the mighties.

14 From Ephraim, their root in Amalek.
After you, Benjamin, in your peoples.
From Machir descended inscribers,
And from Zebulun, drawers in rod, counter.

15 And commanders in Issachar with Deborah
And Issachar, so Barak:
In the valley, sent in his feet.
In divisions Reuben:
Great resolutions heart.

16 Why sit between the trivets,
Hearing hissings flocks?
To divisions Reuben:
Great searchings heart.

17 Gilead in side the Jordan dwelt.
And Dan, why sojourn ships?
Asher sat to coast seas,
And upon his breakings dwelt.

18 Zebulun people exposed his soul to death.
And Naphtali upon heights field.

19 Came kings – fought.
Then, fought kings Canaan.
In Taanach, upon waters Megiddo.
Plunder silver – no took.

20 From heavens – fought.
The stars from their highways fought with Sisera.

21 River Kishon swept them away.
River antiquities, river Kishon.
March my soul – strength.

22 Then hammers heels horse.
From gallopings – gallopings his mighties.

23 Curse Meroz said messenger Yehovah.
Cursing curse her inhabitants.
For no came to help Yehovah.
To help Yehovah in the mighties.

Lord God, turn our hearts to be obedient to Your word
Give us wisdom to be ever faithful to You
May we carefully heed each thing we have heard
Yes, Lord God may our hearts be faithful and true

And we shall be content and satisfied in You alone
We will follow You as we sing our songs of praise
Hallelujah to You; to us Your path You have shown
Hallelujah we shall sing to You for all of our days

Hallelujah and Amen...