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The Bee and the Mountain Goat: A Literary Reading of Judges 4

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The present study of Judges 4 is a close reading of the text with special sensitivity to the artistry of the narrative.¹ Its purpose is to advance good interpretation. Such an attempt should need no apology, yet it represents a new development in biblical studies.² Since the rise of critical scholarship in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, historical interests have dominated the scene. Biblical narratives have been minutely examined for whatever historical data they might yield. Even conservative scholars have studied them primarily for historical information. For both wings of biblical scholarship the study of artistry in biblical narrative has been essentially irrelevant. It could be left to the aesthetes because it contributed nothing to the desired knowledge. Substance is what counted; form is only a matter of taste (for both author and reader). An additional factor, it seems (though it is difficult to document), has been the modern assumption that the ancient Israelite narrators were hardly (yet!) capable of literary sophistication; the intent of their texts was presumed to be transparent, on the surface, and one-dimensional.

A spate of recent studies of Old Testament narrative has begun to show how mistaken this assumption was and how wrong-headed was the notion that form and content could be so neatly separated.³ They have also shown how impoverished the modern reading of these narratives has been, not only because scholars have kept themselves insensitive to aesthetic effects

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but also because they have not been tuned to the subtleties and richness of the texts. Ignoring the artistry, they have too often misread and misconstrued the narratives.

But even now there remains a strong residual resistance. No doubt much of this is because biblical scholars by and large have not been trained in the literary arts. The ancient languages and documents and religions and cultures they know, and they are well read in the history and archaeology of the ancient Near East. They are practiced in textual criticism, and they have been exposed to all the various critical methods: source criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism,

redaction criticism, historical criticism. But the art of narrative has not been in their curriculum. Hence most biblical scholars are at a loss concerning how to assess the literary aspect even when it is pointed out. And because literary analysis of this sort can hardly be reduced to a science, they remain suspicious of it. Furthermore, many evangelical biblical scholars seem anxious that a focus on the art of a narrative will weaken its value as report. Whatever the cause, L. Alonzo-Schökel is surely right when he complains that a literary study of the Bible raises "hermeneutical problems" for many interpreters of Scripture.⁴

However, in the final analysis any method must establish its validity by the results it produces. And in biblical studies the test is not whether literary analysis contributes to aesthetic appreciation (though that may be a significant by-product) but whether it advances understanding. Does it sharpen the ear and eye to the author's intentions? Does it enable the reader to catch all the nuances and details of the author's story? The only apology for the present study is my conviction that such an analysis of Judges 4 is persuasive.⁵ It is left to the readers to judge the results.

I begin with an analysis of narrative structure⁶ and then work through the account with special attention to other literary devices.⁷ The final section will draw conclusions regarding the theme.

I

The bounds of this pericope are transparent. Introduction (4:1-3) and conclusion (vv. 23-24; 5:31b) employ the stereotype formulae⁸ characteristic of the central cycle of narratives (3:7—16:31). Use of these formulae sets clear bounds to the prose account of the event (4:4-22). It also indicates that both the prose and the poetic accounts (5:1-31a) have been put to the service of the controlling theme of this central section of the book. Because the discussion here is limited to the prose account, only incident-

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tal references to the poem of chapter 5 will be made.

The stereotype frame of the account is itself significantly structured. It perfectly balances three primary verbal clauses (introduction) with three like verbal clauses (conclusion), all with initial *waw* plus preformative verbs. The pattern is thematically concentric, with reinforcing verbal links:

- A. And the Israelites again did evil in the eyes of Yahweh⁹ (episode initiating): v 1.
- B. And Yahweh sold them into the *hands of Jabin king of Canaan*: v 2.
- C. And the *Israelites* cried to Yahweh: v. 3.
- C' And God¹⁰ subdued... Jabin king of Canaan before the *Israelites*: v. 23.
- B' And the *hand* of the Israelites bore down ever harder on *Jabin king of Canaan*: v. 24.
- A' And the land enjoyed peace forty years (episode closure): 5:31b.

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Thus concentric symmetry underscores reversal of situation. It also focuses attention on the narrated event as the decisive turning point, consistent with what is stated in verses 23-24, where the subduing of Jabin is ascribed to "that day" when Sisera and his mighty force were destroyed, though a continuing struggle ensued before Jabin was wholly "cut off."¹¹

The basic structure of the main body of the narrative is also fairly clear.¹² Verse 11 marks a break in the action, as indicated by a circumstantial clause (plus continuative verbal clause) that introduces a new character and prepares the reader for the sequence of actions that follows. Then at verse 18 the scene has shifted to Jael's tent, where it remains until the denouement in verse 22. An initial reading leaves some uncertainty as to the function of verse 11, the precise point of juncture between the second and third sections (whether v. 17 closes the second or initiates the third), and whether the final section is structured as one or as two episodes.¹³ But that the narrative is composed of three action sequences is obvious enough.

Verses 4-5 are prologue. They introduce the character who sets the action in motion, indicate her role in the community (as prophetess and judge), and locate her in the land. But the author has tightly bound this prologue with the first narrative sequence by means of a twofold *inclusio*. He begins verse 4 (in Hebrew) by abruptly naming Deborah and ends verse 10 (in Hebrew) by naming her again. Within this *inclusio* lies the second. The final clause of the prologue begins (in Hebrew) with "And they went up" (*waw* plus preformative verb), and the final clause of verse 10 begins

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(in Hebrew) with the same verb and form, "And she went up" (*waw* plus preformative verb). The actions indicated involve reversal of movement: "And they went up to her, the Israelites"; "And she went up with them, Deborah." Moreover, an inner connection binds these actions firmly together in plot development. In verse 5 the Israelites "went up" to Deborah for judgment; in verse 10 Deborah "went up" with Barak at the head of the Israelites to effect God's judgment.

Between this prologue and closure seven distinct developments fill out the episode, and a close reading discloses a second concentric structure:

- A. Deborah summons Barak to Kadesh: v. 6a.
- B. Deborah transmits Yahweh's commission to Barak: v. 6b.
- C. Deborah transmits Yahweh's promise of victory: v. 7.
- D. Barak, hesitant, negotiates: v. 8.
- C' Deborah commits herself to accompany Barak as an earnest of Yahweh's promise but qualifies the promise: v. 9a.
- B' Deborah goes with Barak to carry out Yahweh's commission: v. 9b.
- A' Barak summons the tribes to Kadesh: v. 10a.

This structure highlights Barak's irresolution, his dependence on Deborah, and its consequences. The action advances (cf. A with A', B with B'; and C with C'), but suspense is also awakened:

How will a venture led by such an agent succeed? Is Deborah the "woman" who will be covered with glory?

The second action sequence (vv. 11-17) balances the first in many interesting and significant ways. Like the first it begins (v. 11) with a circumstantial clause that ends with a continuative verbal clause ("and the Israelites went up to her," v. 5; "and he pitched his tent," v. 11). Functionally it also sets a new character on stage, establishes his relationship to Israel, and geographically locates him relative to the unfolding action. This parallelism with verses 4-5 heightens the substantive contrasts between them. Deborah as prophetess and judge is situated in the heart of Israel, and the Israelites go up to her for judgment. Heber, whose family has been allied with Israel since the days of Moses (Num. 10:29-30), separates himself from his clan in the far south (Judg 1:16) and moves to the far north. He is a man of the fringes, but he is in position to be directly involved in the narrative's events.

The abruptness of this break (v. 11) in the narrative flow and its apparent discontinuity with what follows has perplexed interpreters. Yet its link-

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age with verse 12 is much closer than has been recognized (as will be shown later), and it serves to awaken expectations as to the role of this erstwhile ally of Israel in the present crisis. It also prepares for the aftermath of the decisive battle (v. 17). And, as is true of verses 4-5, it is firmly bound to the following sequence by *inclusio*. In Hebrew, verse 12 begins with "Heber the Kenite," and he is named again at the end of verse 17.¹⁴ Following Heber's introduction, the action progresses through eight distinct developments. Here, too, a concentric structure is evident but with one significant asymmetrical element:

- A. Sisera is informed (by Heber): v.12.
- B. Sisera summons his army from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River: v.13.
- *Deborah sends Barak into battle: v. 14a.
- C. Barak descends from Mount Tabor to do battle: v. 14b.
- D. Yahweh overwhelms the enemy: v. 15a.
- C' Sisera descends from his chariot to escape the battle: v. 15b.
- B' Barak pursues the fleeing enemy to Harosheth Haggoyim and destroys Sisera's army: v.16.
- A' Sisera flees to Heber's encampment: v.17.

The structure effectively supports the development of plot and theme. It heightens the reader's perception of reversal of the power status of Sisera, the commander of King Jabin's forces, and of Barak, the commander of Yahweh's army. It also highlights (by asymmetry) the role of Deborah as Yahweh's spokesperson and (by centering) the role of Yahweh Himself as the great victor. This latter, Yahweh's decisive action, stands in sharp contrast to the center of the first episode, where Barak's irresolution as Yahweh's commissioned field commander is exposed, and it deftly points up how groundless was Barak's uncertainty.

Further comparison of the structures of these two episodes brings to light other correspondences and contrasts between them. These can best be shown by setting the action sequences side by side:

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Episode I

Prologue: Deborah, prophetess and judge, holds court in the heartland of Israel, and the Israelites go to her for judgment.

- A. Deborah sends for Barak.
- B. Deborah commissions Barak.
- C. Deborah transmits Yahweh's promise of victory
- D. Barak negotiates.
- E. Deborah commits herself to accompany Barak as an earnest of Yahweh's promise.
- F. Deborah goes with Barak to carry out Yahweh's commission.
- G. Barak assembles his force on Mount Tabor.
- H. Deborah goes up to Mount Tabor with Barak.

Episode II

Prologue: Heber, erstwhile ally of Israel, separates himself from his clan and moves from far south to far north to be near his new ally.

- A. Heber sends word to Sisera.
- B. Sisera summons his army.
- C. Deborah sends Barak into battle with assurances of victory (in language that recalls the promise).
- D. Barak goes to battle.
- E. Yahweh overwhelms the enemy.
- F. Sisera descends from his chariot to escape the battle.
- G. Barak pursues the fleeing enemy to its base at Harosheth Haggoyim.
- H. Sisera flees to Jael's tent.

It seems evident from such comparison that the author has foregrounded Deborah, Yahweh's spokesperson, as Sisera's real (human) nemesis. But he has also (by introducing Jael) awakened uncertainty and therefore suspense concerning which "woman" will receive the glory for Sisera's fall.

The final episode (vv. 18-22) unfolds at Jael's tent. The narrative structure is again marked by symmetry. It begins with Jael "going out to meet" Sisera. She invites him in and motivates him with assurances of safety; he enters her tent, and she conceals him. It ends with Jael "going out to meet" Barak. She directs him to enter and motivates him with expectations of final triumph; he enters her tent, and Sisera is disclosed, dead by Jael's hand.¹⁵ Once again symmetry heightens contrast.

Between these two sequences and accounting for the contrasts are two intervening sequences of speech and response, with shockingly different outcomes. In the first (v. 19) Sisera requests a drink of water to relieve a physical need; Jael responds, and Sisera ends up refreshed, reassured, and

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safely concealed. In the second (vv. 20-21) Sisera directs Jael to stand guard to secure him against his pursuer(s); Jael responds in a surprisingly new way, and Sisera ends up not sleeping but dead.

As in the first two episodes, the critical turning point occurs precisely in the middle (v. 20), when Sisera commits his safety wholly into Jael's hands. He directs her to stand guard at the door of the tent. To any pursuer who inquires, she is to declare that there is "no man here," a declaration by which Sisera unwittingly (and ironically) offers an all-too-true self-assessment and foreshadows his demise that quickly follows.

The three centers—Barak's speech, which betrays his irresolution; Yahweh's vanquishing of the enemy; and Sisera's speech, in which he unknowingly speaks the truth about himself—together characterize the two opposing field commanders and focus narrative attention on Yahweh's decisive action. That in the first episode Deborah and in the last Jael dominate the action surrounding the centers structurally reinforces a major theme in the narrative and evenly distributes the honor for victory between these two redoubtable women.¹⁶

When structure so effectively serves plot and thematic development, balancing action with corresponding or contrasting action, heightening parallels and nurturing irony, artistry both pleases and contributes to lucidity with economy. And it adds another dimension. It teases the reader into slowing his pace, into pausing now and then to take note of the several developments in their interrelatedness, also into savoring the pleasure of discovering that the author has presented not a flat photograph but a hologram to be viewed from various angles. It is fruitless to speculate as to the level of conscious deliberation it required of the narrator to design the structures discernible. These may have sprung simply from a practiced skill in effective narration and an intense sensitivity to the multifaceted and delicately nuanced meanings he wished to convey. But when the reader by some effort uncovers them, they help to bring the author's intent into sharper focus.

II

We are now ready to read through the account, noting additional literary devices employed by the author to convey his message.

The author's stereotype introduction (vv. 1-3) sets the event in the context of his overarching theme, introduced in 2:6—3:6 and consistently carried through in the central cycle of narratives (3:7—16:31). His story is one of Israel's persistent unfaithfulness to Yahweh in the form of stubborn

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apostasy that chose for the gods of the indigenous peoples of Canaan in blatant violation of the covenant. But it is also a story of Yahweh's stern discipline of Israel and His merciful deliverances when His people cry to Him in the crises that His punishment generates. It is, in fact, the latter to which the author devotes most of his narrative attention. And that is true also in the present pericope.

The introduction shows careful syntactic coordination and subordination. Three primary verbal clauses report the major developments: "And the Israelites again did evil in the eyes of Yahweh", "And Yahweh sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan who reigned in Hazor"; "And the Israelites cried to Yahweh." All other information is given in subordinate, circumstantial clauses.

The first of the main clauses echoes 2:11, where the "evil" is specified as "worshiping the Baals." The second echoes 2:14 (see also 3:8; 10:7), employing a metaphor borrowed from economic life. Because Yahweh "sells" Israel "for nothing" (as it is put in Isa. 52:3; see also Ps. 44:12), the emphasis falls on the act of giving over to someone else's control. Still, it probably evokes the practice of selling persons into slavery (see Gen. 37:27, 28, 36; Ex. 21:7, 8, 16; Deut. 15:12; 21:14; 24:7; 28:68; 32:30). With the recipient identified as "Jabin king of Canaan who reigned in Hazor"¹⁷ (see also vv. 17, 23, 24), the "selling" is depicted as a transaction between two suzerains. The oppressor's location in the north completes the round of Israel's vulnerable frontiers, the four quarters from which her security could be threatened (Cushan-Rishathaim had invaded the south, 3:8-9; Moab moved in from the east, 3:12-13; the Philistines pressed from the west, 3:31). The third main clause has no direct counterpart in the introduction to the book, but it employs the conventional language of appeal for help¹⁸ when in distress (*cf.* 2:15).

The first circumstantial clause, "and Ehud was dead," marks the time relative to Ehud's leadership (3:12-30) rather than to that of Shamgar (3:31). For this there was no doubt reason: Of Shamgar the author notes only a striking victory over the Philistines by which he "saved Israel." He ascribes to Shamgar no period of leadership and mentions no period of peace that the victory effected. In any event, the note that Israel apostatized again after Ehud's death comports with the generalization in 2:19, where it is stated that "When the judge died, they again corrupted themselves, more than their fathers, going after other gods."

The two circumstantial clauses attached to the second main clause introduce Sisera¹⁹ as Jabin's field commander and locate his headquarters at

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Harosheth Haggoyim. He is met, then, as a suzerain's designated representative²⁰ whose status and role in the narrative parallels that of Barak. Hence, when these two face each other at the Kishon, the fortunes of two kingdoms are at stake. Sisera's base cannot now be located with any certainty, though it is usually thought to lie somewhere along the Kishon River, where its chariot forces could readily control the plain of Esdraelon and the major highways that traversed it.²¹

To the third main clause are added two further circumstantial clauses. They provide the motivation for Israel's desperate cry for help. The first foregrounds the fearsome main battle force

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of Jabin's²² army, the nine hundred²³ chariots of iron,²⁴ which Israel's volunteer foot soldiers greatly feared; the second indicates the severity and length of the oppression such a force enabled the king of Canaan to impose.

With the stage set, the author plunges abruptly into his story by naming Deborah. It would be well, then, to pause here to examine the names of all those who subsequently play a role in the account in order to note their meanings, of which the original readers would have been well aware and which the author could exploit, if he chose, to support the development of his plot.²⁵ Deborah means "bee," famed for both its sting²⁶ and its honey.²⁷ She is identified as "wife of Lappidoth," whose name refers to the flame of torches (7:16, 20; 15:4, 5; and elsewhere) or to flashes of lightning (Ex. 20:18; Nah. 2:4). The latter is the more likely to be evoked here because of the close relationship between Deborah, wife of Lappidoth, and Barak, whose name (*bārāq*) clearly means "lightning" (Ex. 19:16;²⁸ Job 38:25; Pss. 77:18; 97:4; 135:7; and elsewhere). But *bārāq* is also used to refer to or characterize Yahweh's sword (Deut. 32:41), His arrows (2 Sam. 22:15; Pss. 18:14; 144:6; Zech. 9:14), and His spear (Hab. 3:11). In one striking passage it is said of the chariots of Yahweh's army that He sends against Nineveh that "their appearance is as *lappîdîm* (lightning); they dart about like *bērāqîm* (lightning)" (Nah. 2:5, Heb.). Barak is further identified as "son of Abinoam," that is, of "My (divine) Father is Delightfulness"—the root *n'm* indicates that which is beautiful/pleasant/delightful because it bestows benefits (see Prov. 2:10; 3:17; 16:24; 22:18; 24:4; Pss. 16:6, 11; 133:1; and note especially Ps. 27:4-6, and also 90:17, where *nō'am* is usually rendered "favor" [of Yahweh]).²⁹

The name Heber comes from a verbal root that, with a personal subject, usually means to unite with, be joined with, be in league with another (or others).³⁰ Its cognate noun refers to a companion, associate, partner, friend, ally (Pss. 45:7; 119:63; Prov. 28:24; Eccles. 4:10; Song of Sol. 1:7;

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8:13; Isa. 1:23; Ezek. 37:16,19).³¹ Hence the name suggests "associate" or "ally." But the verb is also used (together with its corresponding noun form) in the sense of binding by means of casting a spell over someone (Deut. 18:11; cf. Isa. 47:9,12) or charming a snake (Ps. 58:5). As a Kenite, Heber is identified as a smith/metalworker, for that is what the name suggests.³² Jael's name means "mountain goat" (1 Sam. 24:2; Job 39:1; Ps. 104:18), and she is "wife of Heber the Kenite."

So the Israelite company of players in this drama is made up of Bee, wife of Lightning; Lightning, son of My (divine) Father is Delightfulness (source of favor/benefits); Ally the Smith; and Mountain Goat, wife of Ally the Smith. Though Deborah is not Barak's wife, their close association here and the synonymy of *lappîdôt* and *bērāqîm* suggests a narrative relationship between them that parallels that between Heber and Jael.

With the meanings of these names in mind, consider the story.

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Deborah is identified immediately as a prophetess (before naming her husband).³³ This marks her as a spokesperson for Yahweh and signalizes her role in the events to follow.³⁴ It also presents these as Yahweh-initiated events. Her announced status as judge (v. 4), to whom "the Israelites go up for judgment" (v. 5), identifies her as the source of justice where the wronged in Israel can secure redress and the oppressed relief. In context, it awakens expectations that she will also deliver the oppressed tribes from Jabin's harsh rule.

Appropriate to her role as judge, she holds court in Israel's heartland ("between Ramah and Bethel, in the hill country of Ephraim"). But why does the writer pinpoint her position as "under the date palm³⁵ of Deborah"? That the date palm had certain sacred associations in the ancient Near East seems evident from its extensive use in glyptic art and in temple decorations (1 Kings 6; Ezek. 40-41).³⁶ But there may be an additional motive. It appears likely that what the Old Testament refers to as "honey" included the sweet syrup of the date.³⁷ If the author is playing on the meaning of names, he here shows us Deborah (Bee) holding court under a "honey" tree, where she dispenses the sweetness of justice (cf. Isa. 5:20; Amos 5:7; 6:12).³⁸

While reading this prologue, the reader will have been arrested by a striking verbal link with the introduction. There, in a circumstantial clause, he was told: "And he (Sisera) resided (*yôšēb* [sat in command], participle) at Harosheth Haggoyim." Here, in a like circumstantial clause, he reads: "And she (Deborah) resided (*yôšebet* [held court], participle) under the Date Palm." Thus he has already received a hint that a fateful collision

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is in the offing between the one who sits in command at Harosheth Haggoyim and she who sits in judgment in the hill country of Ephraim.

Action begins with Deborah's summoning the warrior Barak,³⁹ which her recognized status as spokesperson for Yahweh and as judge gives her the authority to do. She calls him from Kadesh Naphtali,⁴⁰ a few miles northwest of Hazor. There, quite belying his name (lightning), Barak has up till now remained passive⁴¹ while the king of Canaan rebuilt his power and for many years imposed harsh rule over the northern tribes.

Wasting no words on Barak's reaction to Deborah's summons, on his journey to her, or on his manner of greeting her when he arrives, the author keeps focus on Deborah by reporting immediately the commission from Yahweh that she has for him ("And she sent, and she summoned Barak... and she said to him..."). Her opening words—"Has not Yahweh the God of Israel commanded?"—could be taken as a rebuke for Barak's failure hitherto to act on behalf of his fellow Israelites, either in accordance with some earlier directive or with Yahweh's standing orders (and promises) concerning the conquest of the land. And that is how some have taken them. More likely, they represent an asseverative: "Yahweh... has certainly commanded."⁴² The idiom is emphatic.

It introduces the very words of Yahweh, which Deborah transmits as Yahweh's spokesperson. Here Israel's Great King speaks through the mouth of Deborah and charges His servant Barak

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(lightning) to "Go (*lēk*) and deploy (*māšaktā*) on Mount Tabor." The rendering "deploy" is uncertain,⁴³ though it may be supported by 20:37⁴⁴ If correct, it suggests that Barak personally had a force at his command⁴⁵ that he was to augment with "ten thousand men from Naphtali and Zebulun."⁴⁶ Mount Tabor, an isolated peak at the northeast end of the plain of Esdraelon, is designated as Barak's base of attack. The Israelite reader would know its strategic advantages, that its steep, wooded sides provided absolute security against chariot attack and that its high summit (more than a thousand feet above the plain) gave a commanding view all around.

Immediately following Yahweh's commission comes Yahweh's promise: "And I will draw (*māšaktī*) to you, to the Kishon River, Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, and his chariots and his troops." (Ultimately they are Jabin's, but Sisera commands them.) As Barak is to *māšak* his forces on Mount Tabor, so Yahweh will *māšak* the enemy army to the plain below, along the Kishon. The verb is the same, thus paralleling Barak's and Yahweh's actions and highlighting the fact that ultimately it is Yahweh who brings both armies into the field. Yet there is a difference. Yahweh is

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not Jabin, to send Sisera afield, or Sisera, to deploy his army; but He is the sovereign Lord. And the idiom is different: *māša 'el*. He will "draw" Sisera "to" a fateful meeting with His servant Barak, and to the Kishon River, which will—but that awaits the event; for now, it only suggests a specific location for the upcoming battle and awakens curiosity as to the part the river may play in the outcome. The battle will be no mere skirmish. Sisera's chariots will be there in full force; that is foregrounded. But so will be his infantry. Sisera will be "drawn" into committing his whole army.

Now comes the climax of Yahweh's promise: "I will give him into your hand." That is Sisera, of course, but not apart from the army he commands and by which he has enforced Jabin's rule.

One might object that this early disclosure of the outcome reduces climactic tension, that it robs the story of suspense. But that would be to misconstrue the story. It is not an account of a battle but of a divine deliverance and of how those called to be servants of Yahweh respond to Him (specifically to His commands and promises).

Once the commission has been delivered and the promise spoken, Deborah—and Yahweh—fall silent. And Barak speaks for the first, and only, time. He responds to Deborah, not to Yahweh. He has heard Deborah, not Yahweh. Deborah has said.... Let Deborah act on her words. Only then will Barak undertake this impossible venture. Deborah has commanded, "Go!" Barak answers, "If you will go with me, I will go. If you will not go with me, I will not go." Deborah's (and Yahweh's) command to "go" is repeated in Barak's reply like a mocking echo.⁴⁷ According to Job 38:35, when God sends His bolts of lightning (*bērāqīm*), they "go" (*hālak*), but Barak (*bārāq*) will not "go" unless...⁴⁸

It is clear that Barak has not been eagerly awaiting a word from Yahweh to go forth as Yahweh's "lightning" sword against the oppressor of Israel. His quiescence all these years betrays him, and

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now also his dullness to hear the voice of Yahweh, and his hesitancy, and his negotiating for reassurances and support. He will not act simply upon Yahweh's command and promise. Perhaps he wished to have a messenger of Yahweh by his side in this bold undertaking to provide directions for the battle. But there was more to it than that. He had no confidence in Yahweh's word. He needed an earnest of Yahweh's promise, and he needed the courage and faith of this woman to be the staff on which his little courage and little faith could lean.

Quickly and resolutely Deborah responds: "I will surely go with you." She who had said to Barak in Yahweh's name, "Go," unhesitatingly commits herself to "go." She believes Yahweh's promise. So now the decisive

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commitment to "go" and the effective leadership in the "going" is Deborah's, not Barak's.

Barak's hesitancy, his lack of faith, and his dependence on Deborah affects the outcome and alters the promise. There will accrue to Barak no glory along the "way" he is "going" (participle). The language is ambiguous, no doubt studiedly so. Barak is about to go on a "way" (the Hebrew participle often expresses impending action). But he is also already "going"⁴⁹ a "way." That is, he is comporting himself in a certain manner. In the "way" he is now "going", and is about to "go," glory (fame/honor) will elude him. "For into the hands of a woman Yahweh will sell⁵⁰ Sisera."

The promise of victory is not withdrawn, but a woman will bring the awesome Sisera down. This time "into the hand of" is brought forward from the end (cf. v. 7) to the initial position to underscore the altered prospect.⁵¹ And Deborah's word cuts two ways. To Barak's lack of faith it proclaims that Yahweh is able to "sell" Sisera even into the hands of a woman (just as He had "sold" Israel into the hands of Jabin and Sisera with their nine hundred chariots of iron, v. 2). Why should Barak (Lightning, son of My Father is Delightfulness) have doubted? It also announces that because Barak doubted, though victory will be his, the glory will go to a woman.

This exchange arouses suspense and focuses it. Victory for Barak, but what of the Kishon, and what of this unnamed woman?⁵² As of now there is but one woman on stage, a woman who aggressively advances the action: "And Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kadesh" to carry out Yahweh's commission.

From Kadesh Deborah had called Barak; now back to Kadesh Deborah and Barak return. And there at Kadesh "Barak called out (*wayyiz'aq*) Zebulun and Naphtali," in accordance with Deborah's instructions (v. 6). The author could not resist a chiasm ("Naphtali and Zebulun," v. 6; "Zebulun and Naphtali," v. 10), or is it by chiasm that he emphasizes fulfillment of the first stage of Yahweh's instructions?

"And there went up at his feet 10,000 men." The actions of this verse correspond to the instructions in verse 6 ("Go and deploy on Mount Tabor, and take with you 10,000 men"), but they are carried out in reverse order (as they only could be). This correspondence and the nicely designed chiasm makes ellipsis possible: The "going up" refers to the mountain from which

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Barak is to launch his attack. The expression "at his feet" (*běraglāyw*) means contextually "under his command," but it subtly reminds the reader that Barak marches at the head of foot soldiers in contrast to Sisera's chariot force.⁵³

"And she went up with him, Deborah," to Mount Tabor, where she is

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found next (v 14). As noted earlier, she (the "judge") now goes up with Barak and the tribes to effect a judgment on the oppressor of Israel (cf. v 5). With "Deborah" the episode began and with "Deborah" it ends.

Now that Deborah, Barak, and the tribes are assembled on Mount Tabor, Yahweh's command (v 6) has been carried out. The moment has come for the narrator to relate the fulfillment of the promise: "And I will draw to you, to the Kishon River, Sisera." Abruptly he injects a circumstantial clause introducing Heber the Kenite.⁵⁴ All the while the reader has wondered how Yahweh will manage to bring Sisera and his army on the scene. The author now tells us. But the reader must listen carefully, because he is offered only hints, as if to match the hiddenness and mystery of Yahweh's providential action. But the hints are there in the name, the relationship identified, the action mentioned, and the juxtaposition with verse 12. "Now Ally the Smith had separated himself from the Kenites (smiths), the descendants of Hobab, Moses' father-in-law, and pitched his tent by the Oak in Zaananim, which is near Kadesh. And Sisera was told...."

Heber belonged to a clan associated with Israel from the days of Moses and allied with Judah since the conquest (1:16). He has, however, separated from them and moved north, most certainly to ply his trade. And who would need a smith more than the king who was assembling a force of nine hundred chariots of iron? So Ally the Smith had made a new alliance. The clues are all present but in the manner of a riddle to tease the mind and awaken expectation of resolution. And it comes, at the very end of the episode: "For there was peace (an alliance) between Jabin king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite" (v. 17).

Ally the Smith was tenting near Kadesh, so he knew of Barak's preparations far from Sisera's base at Harosheth Haggoyim. "And Sisera was told...."

But why the notation "by the Oak in Zaananim"?⁵⁵ Was it merely shade that Heber desired? Such trees were often the sites of cult places because there, it was thought, one might have communication with and enjoy the protection of the divine realm.⁵⁶ Perhaps that was Heber's main concern. The author does not say so expressly, but he hints as much, and the "Oak in Zaananim" is obviously being played off against "the palm tree of Deborah" (v. 5).

"Barak son of Abinoam has gone up to Mount Tabor." That is the word sent to Sisera. From that he knows that his power is being challenged. "And Sisera called out (*wayyiz' aq*)" his forces. His response is to do exactly what Barak had done. A lengthening chain of parallel actions leads on to the fateful confrontation: Sisera sat in command (*yāšab*), and Deborah

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held court (*yāšab*); Yahweh, who sold (*mākar*) Israel into the hands of Jabin, will sell (*mākar*) Sisera into the hands of a woman; Barak is to deploy (*māšak*) on Mount Tabor, and Yahweh will draw (*māšak*) Sisera to him; all Israel went up (*‘ālā*) to Deborah and Deborah went up (*‘ālā*) with Barak; Barak calls out (*zā‘aq*) the tribes, and Sisera calls out (*zā‘aq*) his army.

He calls out all the forces he commands: "his chariots, the 900 chariots of iron, and all the troops who are with him" (the battle will truly be decisive). He calls them "from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River"; Yahweh has "drawn" the enemy to the place He had chosen.

Now the hour of decision has come. Deborah the prophetess speaks to Barak. He has had his say (v. 8), his one speech in which he disclosed the irresolute spirit within him. He initiates no inquiry; he simply awaits directions from Deborah (the bee). Now it comes: "Up, for this is the day," the day of the Lord's triumphant action, "the day in which Yahweh has given Sisera into your hand." The tense of "has given" is usually indicative of completed action but was often employed to announce beforehand Yahweh's sure act.⁵⁷ "Sisera into your hand" is an echo of the original promise of victory (v. 6). But the qualification still stands: "Into the hand of a woman will Yahweh sell Sisera" (v. 9). So the puzzle remains.

Then comes an assuring word. "Has not Yahweh gone out before you?" Again the asseverative (cf. "Has not Yahweh commanded?" v. 6). Yahweh has certainly gone forth to the battle. You, Barak, need only follow the Great Warrior ("Yahweh is a warrior," Ex. 15:3).⁵⁸

The reader does not yet know it, but this is Deborah's last word. Expectations have been awakened that she will be in on the denouement. Here as Yahweh's spokesperson, whose presence at Kadesh and on Mount Tabor was an earnest of Yahweh's commission and promise, she launches the attack that will bring glory to a woman. But when next a woman appears in the narrative, after the battle, it is Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite (Ally the Smith).

"And Barak descended from Mount Tabor." The language is sparse, but it evokes a scene of high drama, of fearful power unleashed. Yahweh has already sallied forth to the battle. Now, at the command of His adjutant, Yahweh's chosen field commander, Barak, descends from the top of Tabor. Yahweh's flashing sword/spear/arrow, His flashing chariot, descends from on high to engage the mighty host on the plain. And with him 10,000 from the tribes of Israel.

"And Yahweh overwhelmed Sisera... before Barak." That is all that is told, nothing more. But anything more would have distracted from the

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awesomeness of this divine act. The language chosen stirs the imagination to recreate its essential features. "*Wayyāhām Yahweh*," says the author. The verb occurs thirteen times in the Old Testament, in all but three with Yahweh as subject. Of these, eight speak of Yahweh the Warrior

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overwhelming His enemies,⁵⁹ and in six of these He does so by attacking out of the thunderstorm,⁶⁰ He

who makes the clouds His chariot,
who goes on the wings of the wind,
who makes winds His agents,
flashes of lightning His servants (Ps.104:3b-4).⁶¹

But most suggestive of all for the scene the writer evokes are the words of Psalms 18:14⁶² and 144:6. In Psalm 18 David celebrates with graphic conventional imagery the onslaught of the heavenly Warrior against the powerful enemies of His servant:

Yahweh thundered from heaven,
the voice of the Most High resounded.
He shot His arrows and scattered them [the enemy],
great bolts of lightning and overwhelmed them
(*bĕrāqim rāb wayyĕhūmmēm*) (vv. 13-14).

Psalm 144 contains many echoes of Psalm 18, among them:

Part your heavens, O Yahweh, and come down;
touch the mountains, so that they smoke.
Flash lightning (*bĕrôq bārāq*) and scatter them;
shoot your arrows and overwhelm them
(*ūtĕhūmmēm*) (vv. 5-6).

The picture is clear. Yahweh goes forth in storm cloud before Barak; then down from Mount Tabor comes Barak, Yahweh's "lightning" weapon. "And Yahweh overwhelmed Sisera... before Barak." The reader does not need the poetic account (see 5:20-21) to know that the heavenly Warrior has struck from heaven out of a thunderstorm to confound and mire and sweep away the great ranks of chariots and infantry. They were massed, he had been told, though only now he understands why, along the Kishon.

Sisera is overwhelmed "and all his chariots and all his encampment [army]." Once again (cf. vv. 3, 7, 12) the chariots are foregrounded as the

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main power base of the enemy. Yahweh overwhelmed them "by the sword" (*lēpi ħereb*). The idiom with *hāmam* is unusual,⁶³ but so is "before Barak" (*lipnē bārāq*), which follows. But by means of it the author has achieved a telling double wordplay with which to conclude this central,⁶⁴ decisive line. There is *lēpî* and *lipnē*. But more striking and more plot central are *rekeb* (chariot), *ħereb* (sword), and *bārāq* (Barak).

"And Sisera descended." So had Barak (v. 14). The chain of parallel acts is extended: Sisera *yāšab*/Deborah *yāšab*; Yahweh *mākar*/Yahweh *mākar*; Barak *māšak*/Yahweh *māšak*; Israelites

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‘*ālā*/Deborah ‘*ālā*; Barak *zā‘aq*/Sisera *zā‘aq*; Barak descends (*yārad*)/Sisera “descends (*yārad*) from his chariot” to flee the battle. Structural balance,⁶⁵ similarity of the clauses both in syntax and length (nineteen syllables; seventeen syllables), and sameness in both initial verb and final pronominal suffix all contribute to highlight the parallelism, the contrast, and the irony:

And descended (*wayyēred*) Barak from Mount Tabor, and 10,000 men after him (‘*aḥārāyw*).

And descended (*wayyēred*) Sisera from his chariot and fled on his feet (*bēraglāyw*).

“On his feet” (*bēraglāyw*) is idiomatically and logically superfluous but is employed here (see also v. 17) for ironic effect. After Yahweh and His Lightning have struck, Sisera’s iron chariot cannot even provide a means of escape. Sisera has been reduced to the absurd, and our narrator knew how to depict it. But *bēraglāyw* is also an echo. It recalls a phrase heard first in v.10: “And 10,000 went up [Mount Tabor] at his feet (*bēraglāyw*.” Barak ascends with 10,000 *bēraglāyw*; Sisera descends to flee (alone) *bēraglāyw*. The ironical contrast is intended, and to achieve it the author once more employs the technique of verbal repetition, thus extending his chain of parallels yet another link.

The mighty commander of chariots flees the battle like one of the lowly foot soldiers who are beating a hasty retreat toward Harosheth Haggoyim. But is Sisera among them? It is one of the narrator’s finest touches that here he does not give us even a hint. He leaves us to believe, as did Barak, that Sisera fled with his troops. Only after he has brought pursuing Barak to the enemy’s base does he inform us, and then it is to surprise us with Sisera’s solitary flight to Heber’s encampment.

He closes the episode with a pair of nicely balanced sentences showing

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us the two principals leaving the battlefield in contrasting pursuits and opposite directions:

And Barak pursued after the chariots and after the army to Harosheth Haggoyim; and all of Sisera’s army fell by the sword, not one was left (v 16).

And Sisera fled on his feet to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was an alliance between Jabin king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite [Ally the Smith] (v.17).

The victor and the vanquished are both pounding the earth with winged feet away from the site of battle. But the tables have turned: Barak presses on to catch Sisera before he can recover or find refuge; Sisera hurries to escape, so as not to “fall into the hands of”⁶⁶ Barak. Irony abounds. Barak with his 10,000 goes in hot pursuit of Sisera’s chariots and army; Sisera on foot takes flight alone. Barak pursues to Harosheth Haggoyim; Sisera flees to Kadesh. Barak, triumphant,

arrives at the enemy's base, mopping up the remnants of the Canaanite army; Sisera, defeated, arrives at the tent of a woman, far from the fury of combat and safe from the avenging sword.⁶⁷ Still, Barak misses his quarry. And what of Sisera?

The great battle is over, but the story is not finished; it cannot be finished. The author has raised expectations that must not be left suspended. Yahweh's promise to Barak had been, "I will give Sisera into your hand." And that promise had been subsequently qualified: "Yahweh will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." The promise remains unfulfilled, and it is not yet known how it is that the glory will not be Barak's or who the "woman" is of whom Deborah had spoken. Is it dauntless Deborah, who was still with Barak on Mount Tabor and who had sent him descending the mountain into the battle? Or is it Jael, the wife of Jabin's ally Heber, to whose tent Sisera has fled for safety?

The last two sentences with which the battle scene closes report simultaneous actions: Barak pursuing, Sisera fleeing. These might have been given in reverse order. But the author had his reasons for the order he chose. He had a structural reason, as was observed earlier. And he had achieved a moment of fine suspense. But more than that, his chosen order allows him a smooth transition to the final act in the drama. Denouement takes place not at Harosheth Haggoyim but at Jael's tent, and that is where the narrator has brought us at the end of his battle account.

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"And Jael went out to meet Sisera." No details are given about Sisera's flight, the course taken, the difficulties encountered, the time required, the fear that drove the fugitive on and the fatigue that slowed his pace, the hopes and expectations he entertained, or the plans he devised along the way for gaining Heber's protection. Because the outcome is affected by none of these they are passed over. When Sisera reaches Heber's encampment, his fate lies in hands other than his own.

Whereas Deborah had summoned Barak to come to her, Sisera arrives at Heber's camp on his own volition. But on his arrival Jael takes the initiative. She goes out to meet⁶⁸ her husband's ally, addresses the field commander with proper respect, and offers him hospitality and refuge: "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; do not be afraid." As Deborah had instructed (imperative) Barak to "go," so now Jael invites (imperative) Sisera to "turn aside" from his going. Her motives remain hidden. Neither Sisera nor the reader have cause to suspect them. And yet there is Deborah's word about a "woman." There is also the fact that Jael intrudes in a matter that concerns Sisera and her husband Heber. Yes, she intrudes. Sisera is passing by on his way (no doubt to Heber's tent), and she intercepts him with her "turn aside... turn aside to me."⁶⁹ Alliteration calls attention to her word: "Jael went out to meet Sisera, and she said to him surd, my lord, *sûrâ* to me."

Why, also, this "Do not fear?" Jael knows that out of fear Sisera is fleeing, that he will "turn aside" only if he has found a place where he need no longer fear. That is what she offers him. Implicit in her "Do not fear" is a promise belying Deborah's (initial) promise to Barak: You will not be given into any man's hand. The irony can hardly be missed.⁷⁰ But what of Deborah's revised promise? And what of this newly promising woman? The reader wonders.

"And he turned aside to her tent." The great general, who but recently commanded nine hundred chariots of iron and thousands of infantry, is diverted from his course by the invitation of a woman. As Deborah, wife of Lappidath, had directed the course of Barak, now Jael directs the course of Sisera. Deborah sent forth Barak to public exploits; Jael receives Sisera into her private quarters: "And she covered him with a robe."⁷¹ The erstwhile scourge of Israel, chariot-mounted and fearsome, lies prostrate on the ground shielded from the avenging Barak by a robe, a tent, and a woman.

From the ground he speaks; it is an appeal: "Please give me a little wa-

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ter. I'm thirsty." Like Samson, he is only a man and suffers an ordinary human need. Is his need also life-threatening, as it was with Samson after he had exerted himself in battle (15:18)? In any event, his total dependence on Jael is presented concretely.

In response, she acts the perfect hostess. Without a word "she opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink." Or, as the poem puts it:

He asked for water, and she gave him milk;
in a bowl fit for nobles, she brought him milk curds (5:25).

Mountain Goat brought him milk, the better, more nourishing drink, which was set before honored guests.⁷²

Here the play on the meaning of Jael's name cannot be missed. It causes the reader to ponder the meaning of Deborah (Bee), the "judge" who has provided Israel the sweetness (honey) of judgment. And if the reader has missed it, it prods him to contemplate "Barak" (Lightning) and "Heber the Kenite" (Ally the Smith). If he has already suspected the author's play on these names, that suspicion is now fully confirmed.

"And she covered him (again)." Having refreshed and reassured Sisera, she returns him to his state of concealment but now in repose.

Again he speaks. No longer the suppliant, he now seeks to take charge of his situation. Jael has opened a skin of milk to revive him. He reads it as evidence of her trustworthiness. His wish had been her command. So now the general commands: "Stand by the opening of the tent." Once more he has a subordinate to take orders, though only this lone woman. He posts her at the door of the tent as a sentry. Irony grows toward full flood. It crests in his follow-up instructions, great Sisera's last words: "If any one comes by and asks, 'Is any man here?' you are to say, 'There is not.'" Unwittingly, Sisera provides a true self-assessment and a sinister foreshadowing of the fate that is about to overtake him. Moreover, by his own decision and act Sisera has committed his safety into Jael's hands, has given himself into the hand of a woman.

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The author has reached the crucial midpoint of his final episode. The reader knows (yet) only that the crisis fast approaches. How will Jael respond now? Will she allow Sisera to take charge? Can she outdo her earlier exceeding of his request? Is this the fateful moment?

There comes an explosion of verbal clauses, and the answer becomes clear. "And Jael wife of Heber [Ally?] took a tent peg, and she took up a mallet in her hand, and she went to him stealthily,⁷³ and she drove the peg

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into his temple,⁷⁴ and it penetrated⁷⁵ into the ground."⁷⁶ To which is briefly added (four words in Hebrew),⁷⁷ "Now he was fast asleep, because he was weary, and so he died."

The reader now sees that Yahweh has been at work to "sell Sisera into the hand of a woman" just as He had effectively "drawn" Sisera and all his army to the Kishon. The reader also sees clearly now the author's insight into how Yahweh had accomplished both. He drew Sisera to the plain along the Kishon by sending Barak and his men to Mount Tabor. He knew that when the commander of chariots saw his power challenged, he would prudently assemble his forces where he was confident he had the advantage. When his army was routed, he made another prudent judgment. Abandoning his army, he made for the tent of his ally, where he thought he would surely find safety only to fall into Jael's hands. Yahweh had accomplished His purpose through Sisera's own free acts. Moreover, ironically, the shadowy figure of Heber plays a decisive role in both developments. This renegade Kenite, who had shifted alliances to help build Jabin's armaments, had betrayed Barak's moves to the field commander. He had thus been instrumental in bringing Sisera to the Kishon. But it was also his proven loyalty to Jabin's cause that recommended him to Sisera when disaster struck as the one to whom he could look for protection. Thus Yahweh used and frustrated this unholy alliance also to achieve His ends.

Suddenly it is over. Sisera is dead, and Jael wife of Heber is revealed as the "woman." She had duped Sisera completely. To this moment she had played the wife of Ally the Smith, associate of King Jabin, flawlessly. But she too has been "under cover." Now with shocking suddenness she shows herself to have been Jael wife of Charmer (the author says carefully "wife of Heber," not as before "wife of Heber the Kenite"). She had charmed the mighty warrior into a harmless sleeper and then dispatched him like a snake.

She had no sword, only the implements with which women secured a tent. A wooden tent peg was her arrow and a wooden mallet the bow with which she shot it to its mark. Having taken (*wattiqqah*) the peg, she drove (*wattitqa'*) it into his temple (*b'raqqātō*)—she, not *bārāq* (Barak). And the commander of chariots of iron ends up pinned to the ground by a wooden tent peg, driven home by a woman's hand.

Here, again, Yahweh's secret working quietly surfaces. Though Heber the Kenite has shifted loyalties, Jael has not. Her heart is still with Israel. When she sees Sisera approaching alone and on foot, she can guess the

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outcome of the battle and that Israel's great enemy had eluded Barak. So she springs into action. With a courage and ingenuity that matches Ehud's, she invites the feared warrior into her own tent, puts him at ease, and then dispatches him. Her bold, fierce loyalty that steels her to act alone, contrary to her husband's commitments, without a word from Yahweh, and armed only with domestic implements, puts Barak to shame. And it is that loyalty that Yahweh uses to checkmate Heber's perfidy and remove the scourge from Israel.

The suddenness of this turn of events and the shocking violence of Jael's deed trigger a series of breath-catching mental images. As they shutter past the mind's eye, there is the half-expectation that the veteran warrior will suddenly spring from the ground and foil the dauntless woman stealing upon him. One forgets that he had said, "Say, 'There is no man here.'"

But nothing happens. The prone figure remains motionless under his covering. The robe that conceals him also conceals her. But is her approach utterly soundless? The only movement is Jael's, climaxed by her swift, fatal blow. And still there is no motion under the robe. The author explains: "Now he was fast asleep, because he was weary, and [thus] he died." From motionless sleep Sisera passed motionless into death, "sold into the hands of a woman" like a piece of chattel.

So the end has come.

But dead Sisera is still concealed from the eyes of the world by a robe, a tent, and a woman. And there was a strong hint in the qualified promise that the glory for Sisera's defeat would go to a woman. There must therefore be a revelation, an uncovering, and it must somehow involve Barak, for whom the qualified promise was a rebuke. So, though Sisera is dead, the story cannot end even yet.

Nor does it. "And [while Sisera lies there still], behold, Barak [comes into view], pursuing Sisera." Irony pervades all in the denouement. Victorious Barak is still pursuing his elusive quarry. But now he is pursuing a dead foe, a lifeless body pinned to the ground by Jael's tent peg.

How is it that Barak comes here alone? By what route did he come? Who told him of Sisera's direction and the goal of his flight? Or was it a shrewd guess that Sisera might seek the protection of his ally the ironsmith? All this is irrelevant to the story that is being told, and the author says nothing of it. It is enough that Barak is here, that though the enemy is destroyed and Barak's own men are (presumably) busy gathering the spoils,⁷⁸ he is still pursuing the one who (originally) was to be "given into his hand."

"And Jael went out to meet him." The chain of parallels receives yet an-

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other link: *yāšab/yāšab*; *mākar/mākar*, *māšak/māšak*, 'ālāl'ālā; *zā'aq/zā'aq*, *yārad/yārad*; *běraglāyw/běraglāyw*; Jael "goes out to meet" Sisera/Jael "goes out to meet" Barak.

"And she said to him, 'Come.'" She did not say, "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me," but spoke an abrupt, commanding "Come" (*lēk*), the very word used by Deborah when she transmitted Yahweh's command, "Go"⁷⁹ (v. 6). So again Barak is directed by a woman with an identical imperative. And a ninth link is added to the chain of parallels.

"And I will show you the man you are seeking." Jael knows that Barak is "pursuing," that he is "seeking the man" who was to be "given into his hand" but who had pronounced himself a "no man" and had become a "no man." Sisera she motivated with "Do not fear (*yārē*)"; Barak she motivates with "I will show" (*rā'a*). She will show him the man he wants so desperately to get "into his hand."

Jael controls events now as in her meeting with Sisera. Sisera had spoken not a word until he entered Jael's tent and had been covered. Barak also speaks no word; he merely follows directions and enters Jael's tent to see. At last he has overtaken his quarry; at last his enemy will be "given into his hand."

"And, behold" is the tenth and final link in the chain of parallels. Shortly ago it was "And, behold, Barak"; now it is "And, behold, Sisera."

The moment of final disclosure has arrived; Jael uncovers Sisera, "fallen, dead, with the tent peg in his temple (*běraqqātō*)." Barak's (*bārāq*) quarry, the great charioteer and commander he had once feared, the vanquished foe he had so single-mindedly and strenuously pursued to get "into his hand," lies before him, with Jael's tent peg *běraqqātō*. It is the final irony, and it surpasses them all.

And Barak remains dumb. The story is ended.

Yahweh has fulfilled His word and delivered His people. Through Deborah, wife of Lightning, who held court under the Date Palm of Deborah, He has sent Lightning, son of My (divine) Father is Delightfulness, to strike a decisive blow on the battlefield; and through Jael, wife of Ally the Smith (but also wife of Charmer), whose tent was near the Oak in Zaananim, He has executed Israel's oppressor. Through Bee and Mountain Goat, two faithful and fearless women, He has destroyed mighty Sisera and restored peace to the Promised Land that "flows with milk and honey."

There remains but to round out the literary framework within which the story is set. Like the introduction (vv. 1-3), it is stereotypical. Yet it provides in general terms some significant information. "God subdued

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that day Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites." The decisive blow had been struck, but a power as old and resilient as this kingdom did not disintegrate in a day. "And the hand of the Israelites pressed down ever harder on Jabin king of Canaan until they had cut off Jabin king of Canaan." Never again would this coalition of Canaanites revive to threaten Israel. "And the land enjoyed peace forty years" (5:31b).

III

By almost any reckoning, Judges 4 is a little masterpiece of narrative. In this it does not stand alone in the Old Testament, of course, not even in Judges itself. But, as it has been seen, careful attention to its art evokes new appreciation for the narrative skill of the author of a story that by a more superficial reading tends to attract little special attention. No one would call it charming or beautiful; it is too lean and muscular for that, befitting its plot and theme. It is better characterized as efficient and effective. Its style is tight and economical. No superfluous details or narrative detours distract from plot development. Structure, syntax, repetition (the parallel chain), alliteration, wordplay, and narrative sequence all contribute coherently to message communication. Even select geographic locations are carefully made part of the story to illumine character roles and elucidate events. At strategic points the author employs conventional phrases that are richly evocative in order to interpret and to add vividness. Contrast, suspense, and irony—especially irony—are utilized to great effect. Most striking of all is the manner in which the suggestive semantic value of names has been put to subtle use to hint at connections and deeper levels of meaning. The narrator was an artist in full control of his medium.

But he was more than an artist, more than a teller of tales. The story as he told it was made to serve the theological theme of his larger narrative. One of the striking features of contemporary Old Testament scholarship is the boldness with which it layers historical hypothesis upon historical hypothesis in order to reconstruct hypothetically in some detail the history of Israel and of the biblical documents and then make these (often conflicting) reconstructions the basis and burden of biblical exposition. For Judges, two good examples are the recent commentaries by J. A. Soggin and R. G. Boling.⁸⁰ One result is the tendency to isolate the several accounts of the various judges from their larger literary context and to study them independently. Even those who, like D. R. Murray, find good literary grounds for questioning proposals of editorial changes within the separate

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narrative units are inclined to exclude the larger context from consideration when discussing the matter of theme. The end result is to treat the various accounts as independent stories. That the author drew on a body of separate traditions can hardly be doubted, but that he has done more than preserve a collection of stories seems beyond dispute. Rather, he chose certain traditions that served his thematic purpose and retold them in a manner conducive to that purpose. Hence context must be given due weight in determining the theme of Judges 4.⁸¹

No thorough discussion of the overarching theme of Judges can be undertaken here. A brief indication of its salient elements will have to suffice. It is generally recognized, and rightly so, that Judges was intended to serve as a continuation of the national epic narrated in the Pentateuch and Joshua. It fills in the gap between the account of the conquest under Joshua and the emergence of the monarchy, for which the ministry of Samuel came to be viewed as prologue (the story told in 1 and 2 Samuel). What should have been a time of consolidation turned out rather to be an era of progressive degeneration and disintegration (consolidation did not come until the reign of David, who completed the wars of Joshua). As a result, nothing went forward. So the writer had not so much a history to recount as an age to characterize.

And that is the focus of his theme, as he tells us expressly in 2:6—3:6. After the death of Joshua, the Israelites did evil in the eyes of Yahweh by turning to the gods of Canaan. No longer acknowledging Yahweh and all He had done for them, they violated the covenant and thus aroused the wrath of their heavenly suzerain. In His anger He turned loose the surrounding peoples on them and withheld His own power to defend them. But He did not altogether abandon them. When they belatedly cried to Him for deliverance, He sent them deliverers (the "judges") to throw off the oppressors and give His people relief. Even so, when the judges died, the people returned to their old ways, to sink even deeper into apostasy. At stake was the future of the kingdom of God on earth and the destiny of Israel. If it were not for Yahweh's stern measures and persistent mercies in the face of Israel's stubborn infidelity, the kingdom of God would have vanished from the earth, and Israel would have been submerged under the nations.

In the central cycle of narratives in which this theme is provided concrete exposition, the story of Judges 4 follows the account of Othniel (3:7-11) and Ehud (vv. 12-30) and precedes those of Gideon-Abimelek (chaps. 6-9), Jephthah (10:6-12:7), and Samson (chaps. 13-16). Given the fact that

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progressive degeneration is one element in the author's announced theme, that Othniel is depicted as a model judge and Samson as the most degenerate, that in the case of Jephthah Israel is dependent on an outcast free-booter, and that Gideon is an even more reluctant deliverer than Barak, the reader possesses one clue to the theme of the Deborah-Barak-Jael story.⁸² Barak's quiescence in the face of Canaanite oppression (belying his name and in contrast with the vigorous initiatives of Othniel and Ehud) and his dependence on Deborah even after being commissioned by Yahweh expose Israel's failure to remember Yahweh and all He had done for her (2:10). Not remembering left her fearful and passive before the resurgent power of the ancient Canaanite kingdom of Hazor. Before chariots of iron Israel quailed, though the sword of Yahweh (Barak, Lightning) was among them.⁸³ Such was her abject submissiveness that at least one of her erstwhile allies (Heber) changed sides and threw in his lot with the Canaanites.

In this crisis and in response to Israel's cry to Him for help, Yahweh raised up two courageous and faithful women to effect His judgment on the oppressor and to subdue once for all the Canaanite threat. Through one He brought His reluctant sword (Barak) into play, and through the other He cut down the great warrior who had marshaled and commanded King Jabin's power.

John H. Stek, "The Bee and the Mountain Goat: A Literary Reading of Judges 4," Walter C. Kaiser & Ronald F. Youngblood, eds., *A Tribute to Gleason Archer. Essays on the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986. Hbk. ISBN: 0802487807. Chapter 3. pp. 53-86.

The victory was wholly Yahweh's, who maneuvered Sisera and his army into a trap and then overwhelmed them before Barak, leaving to that one only to mop up the broken ranks of chariots and foot soldiers. Great Sisera, whom all Israel feared, He "sold" into the hands of a woman, meanwhile also frustrating the unholy alliance between Heber and Jabin. No honor accrued to Barak and his troops. Glory came only to two women who embodied the loyalty and dauntless courage that ought to have characterized the warriors in the army of Yahweh. Again Yahweh was gracious to His faithless people. But He effected deliverance in such a way as to shame Israel's doubts in their heavenly King. Even mighty Sisera is a "no man" to be subdued by a woman when Yahweh executes judgment. If through Bee and Mountain Goat Yahweh can throw off the yoke imposed by Sisera and his nine hundred chariots of iron and restore peace to the land of milk and honey, then Israel, if faithful, can withstand the world. And even when she is unfaithful, Yahweh does not forget His covenant or abandon His purpose.

The story rebukes and promises.

In canonical context, it relates an episode in the history of the Yahweh-Israel relationship that foreshadows Yahweh's mercies to His people through His servant David and ultimately through David's great son.

NOTES

¹ The artistry of this passage has been studied before. L. Alonzo-Schökel offered an analysis ("Erzählkunst im Buche der Richter," *Bib* 42 [1961]:143-72; see esp. pp. 158-67). He was followed eighteen years later by D. F. Murray ("Narrative Structure and Technique in the Deborah-Barak Story, Judges IV 4-22," *VTSup* 30 [1979]:153-89), who undertook a more thorough investigation. More recently has come a brief treatment by B. Lindars ("Deborah's Song: Women in the Old Testament," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 65 [1983]:158-75) in conjunction with his discussion of the literary craftsmanship of chap. 5. Others have offered incidental observations on artistic elements in this pericope while pursuing more traditional critical investigations. The present study makes use of these works but takes issue with some of their conclusions and calls attention to features unnoticed or undeveloped by them.

² *IDBSup*, s.v. "Literature, the Bible as," by D. Robertson, pp. 547-51.

³ A good selective bibliography can now be found in Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, ed. D. M. Gunn (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), pp. 159-70.

⁴ L. Alonzo-Schökel, "Hermeneutical Problems of a Literary Study of the Bible," *VTSup* 28 (1974): 1-15.

⁵ The method and goal of structuralism is here rejected as philosophically wrong-headed and methodologically so abstract as to frustrate rather than promote good interpretation of specific texts. For lucid introductions to structuralism see Robertson, "Literature"; the articles in *Int* 28 (1974), an issue devoted to structuralism; Robert M. Polzin, *Biblical Structuralism: Method and Subjectivity in the Study of Ancient Texts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), esp. pp. 1-43; Philip Pettit, *The Concept of Structuralism: A Critical Analysis* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: U. of Calif., 1977). No attempt will be made here to develop some general theory of narrative. Nor is any general theory of narrative (e.g., genre identification, such as comedy, tragedy, etc.) employed as a basis for analysis. The only assumptions at work are such elementary ones as (1) that a piece of biblical narrative must be studied in the context of the literary tradition to which it belongs (for Judg. 4 that means the narrative literature of the Old Testament, because we have no other contemporary literature of this particular tradition), (2) that the pericope must be taken as a whole within the larger literary work of which it is a part (the synchronic method, which assumes the meaningfulness of the text as it has been transmitted, whatever the process of its composition may have been), (3) that the author exercised total control over his material so that he has excluded all that was extraneous to his purpose, and (4) that

the author was in full control of his linguistic medium, aware of the subtle powers of language and structure to express, suggest, nuance, highlight, depict, color, and thus to present a multifaceted interpretation of the event narrated. All this means that the author's intent can only be understood (the goal of exegesis proper) through close attention to all aspects of his composition, that the text itself must be our teacher, and that it contains nothing superfluous, accidental, or coincidental unless analysis should establish the likelihood of such. In my judgment, many literary studies of Old Testament narratives have missed the mark either because their starting points were from a general literary theory concerning narrative or because they were directed to the development of some such theory. In either case, the specific intent of a specific author with a specific text tends to be overlooked or skewed in the interpretation.

⁶ See S. Bar-Efrat, "Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative," *VT* 30 (1980): 154-73, for a helpful discussion of structure analysis.

⁷ This follows the general pattern of Murray, "Narrative Structure," and is chosen because it reflects a sound methodological sequence.

⁸ These are fully introduced in the paradigmatic account of the first judge (Othniel, 3:7-11) but are adumbrated already in the second part of the general introduction to the book (2:6—3:6).

⁹ All translations of the Hebrew are my own.

¹⁰ For the sequence "Yahweh ... God" elsewhere in the central cycle see 13:8-9; 15:18-19.

¹¹ It is thus evident that the accompanying poem is not arbitrarily placed between B and A': Earlier it would have intruded, later it would have fallen outside the structure so that its function within the central cycle would have been rendered ambiguous.

¹² Alonzo-Schökel, "Erzählkunst," pp. 158-66, compares the action to a two-act drama with each act having two scenes: Act I: vv. 6-10 (scene 1), vv. 12-17 (scene 2); Act II: vv. 18-21 (scene 1), v. 11 (scene 2). Strangely, he treats vv. 1-5 as prologue, taking no account of the stereotype frame that links vv. 1-3 with vv. 23-24, 5:31b. He finds the placement of v. 11 strange, wonders why it does not stand with v. 17, and offers two suggestions: (1) to fill up a pause between the two episodes, or (2) literarily to set a tent between the two armies. It ought to be observed that the imbalance between Acts I and II makes this structural analysis highly questionable. Murray views the structure as made up of four episodes: w 4-10; 11-16; 17-21; 22 ("Narrative Structure," pp. 156-66).

¹³ More fully discussed below.

¹⁴ As was indicated in n. 12, whereas Alonzo-Schökel links v. 17 with w 11-16, Murray links it with w 18-21. He bases his conclusion on three considerations: (1) v. 17 contains a scene shift (to Jael's tent, where the next episode takes place), (2) circumstantial clauses (such as v. 17a) often serve to initiate episodes in Hebrew narrative (and do so here: vv. 4, 11-to which Murray adds v. 22a), and (3) parallel structure of the four (according to Murray's analysis) episodes, each of which begins with a circumstantial clause. These considerations are weighty, but not wholly convincing. They depend too much, in my judgment, on purely formal considerations that are of questionable value. It is to be noted (1) that v. 10 ends the first episode with a scene shift that prepares for the following episode (*cf.* vv. 10b and 12), (2) that circumstantial clauses are also used as episode closures (*cf.* v. 16), and (3) that the isolation of v. 22 as a separate episode does violence to the unity of vv. 18-22 (as will be shown later). The parallel structure of vv. 16a and 17a argues rather for a double circumstantial closure indicating concurrent actions on the part of Barak and Sisera subsequent to the battle, the outcome of which is reported in v.15. After the debacle on the battlefield, during which Sisera dismounts and takes to his heels, Barak pursues the fleeing chariots and troops while Sisera is fleeing afoot toward Kadesh. The episode closes, therefore, with this ironical reversal of movements on the part of the army commanders and a narrative return to Heber's tent, with a full disclosure of the (hitherto hinted) relationship between Heber and Sisera.

¹⁵ Alonzo-Schökel posits a break at v. 22 as between two scenes of an Act; Murray sets off v. 22 as a fourth episode coordinate with w. 17-21. I have argued above (in agreement with Alonzo-Schökel) that v. 17 completes the second episode, so that Murray's schematic argument for reading the circumstantial clause at v. 22a as episode-initiating fails. It must, moreover, be acknowledged that *hinnēh* plus circumstantial clause can also stand in an inner-episodal position. Here that seems clearly to be the case. The action all takes place at Jael's tent, she dominates it throughout, and it marches by even stages to the denouement: Jael invites Sisera into her tent, she puts him physically and psychologically at ease, she kills him with her mallet and tent peg, she discloses to Barak his fallen foe. Barak, however, must be brought on the scene, which is achieved by the circumstantial *hinnēh* clause.

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¹⁶ Murray's observation that after v. 7 "the story-line develops basically around the actions of the men" ("Narrative Structure," p. 168) is not borne out by this analysis. In fact, in the first episode Deborah wholly dominates the scene (Barak acts only as directed and supported by her) and in the third Jael. In the second episode Sisera reacts (he is being "drawn" into a trap, see discussion below), but the initiative for the battle itself comes from Deborah and the victory from Yahweh.

¹⁷ The supposed historical problems raised by this identification have occasioned extensive discussions. Because Joshua is said to have defeated Jabin king of Hazor and destroyed his royal city (Josh. 11:1-10), many scholars suppose the text here represents a fusion of traditions. The problem is aggravated by the fact that the title "king of Canaan" occurs nowhere else and that Hazor seems not to have been revived as a Canaanite royal city after its destruction by fire in the thirteenth century B.C. (see Yigael Yadin, *Hazor. The Schweich Lectures*, 1970 [London: Oxford U., 1972]; also his article "Hazor" in *IDBSup*). See the commentaries and the further literature to which they refer. This is not the place to assess all the proposed solutions that have been offered, but it is appropriate to raise the question of whether the problem might not be largely of the critics' own making. Historical scholarship, like physical nature, abhors a vacuum, so it rushes to bridge gaps in the sources of our knowledge by means of ingenious hypotheses that then sometimes develop vigorous lives of their own. Patience, caution, restraint, and modesty are virtues historians might better prize more highly than the boldness and inventiveness they now are pleased to honor. In the present case it is not impossible that Jabin was used by the author as a dynastic name, that "king of Canaan" was an ancient designation of this dynasty, and that reference to Hazor is to the historical royal city of the Jabin dynasty rather than to a present reality. Josh. 11:10 tells us that "Hazor beforetime was the head of all those kingdoms," and documents from Egypt and Mari attest to Hazor's preeminence in this region throughout the second millennium B.C. until it was destroyed. See A. Malamat, "Hazor, 'The Head of All Those Kingdoms,'" *JBL* 79 (1960): 12-19.

¹⁸ Cf. Gen. 41:55; Ex. 5:15; 14:10; 15:25; Num. 12:13; Deut. 26:7; Josh. 24:7; Judg. 10: 12; 2 Kings 6:5; 8:3, 5; Ps. 107:6, 28; Isa. 19:20. These all use the verb *šā'aq*. Actually the author of Judges seems to have preferred the related verb *zā'aq* (see 3:9, 15; 6:6, 7; 10:10, 14; and for its use elsewhere, see, e.g., Ex. 2:23; 1 Sam. 7:8, 19; 12:8, 10; 1 Chron. 5:20; Ps. 107:13, 19; Jer. 11:11-12; Hos. 8:2; Joel 1:14; Jonah 1:5; Mic. 3:4). Perhaps the choice here was dictated by a desire for differentiation between this cry for help and the calling out (*zā'aq*) of troops in vv. 10, 13.

¹⁹ The name is non-Semitic. If Albright is right, it is Luvian, which links Sisera with the Philistines or related Sea Peoples (originally from the Aegean region). See William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), p. 51; "Prolegomenon" to C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges* (New York: Ktav, 1970), p. 15.

²⁰ Sisera was the real key to his power, as David was temporarily for Saul (1 Sam. 17-18) and as Naaman was for the king of Aram (2 Kings 5:1).

²¹ See the Bible encyclopedias and atlases for the several suggestions. The name appears to be descriptive, but whether it refers to a wooded area or to plowlands is unclear, and though Haggoyim seems clearly to be "of the nations" it is uncertain whether it is descriptive of a mixture (or coalition) of ethnic communities or is related to an ethnic group relatively recently migrating to the area (see Hos. 12:23).

²² The Hebrew pronoun ("he") refers to the one named in the previous main clause.

²³ The number surely indicates a coalition; cf. "the kings" of 5:19.

²⁴ The "chariots of iron" were chariots with certain iron fittings, perhaps axles and hubs. The expression is similar to "throne of ivory" (1 Kings 10:18), "house of ivory" (22:39; Amos 3:15), "palaces of ivory" (Ps. 45:8), "deck of ivory" (Ezek. 27:6), "beds of ivory" (Amos 6:4), "shields of gold" (2 Sam. 8:7; 10:16-17; 14:26), "couches of gold and silver" (Esther 1:6), "idols of silver and idols of gold" (Isa. 2:20; cf. 30:22; 40:19). See James D. Muhly "How Iron Technology Changed the Ancient World and Gave the Philistines a Military Edge," *BAR* 8 (November-December 1982): 40-54.

²⁵ Most interpreters have taken note of the meanings of the names (in context their subtle relevance to the story can hardly be missed), but they have not pursued the matter sufficiently. That Hebrew authors often made narrative use of such meanings can hardly be disputed. A greater sensitivity to this practice sheds light on many a passage.

²⁶ See Deut. 1:44; Ps. 118:12; Isa. 7:18.

²⁷ Sugar, lacking honey, was the main sweetener of the ancients.

²⁸ Significantly, the same meteorological phenomenon that is called *bērāqîm* here is called *lappidîm* in Ex. 20:18. The two terms occur as synonyms also in Nah. 2:4 (5).

²⁹ Cf. also the names Ahinoam (My [divine] Brother is Delightfulness) and Elnaam (God is Delightfulness).

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³⁰ See Gen. 14:3; 2 Chron. 20:35-37; Dan. 11:6, 23.

³¹ Some interpreters related Heber's name to a much less common cognate noun referring to a group, clan, or band (Hos. 6:9), but this seems much less likely.

³² *IDB*, s.v. "Kenites," by George M. Landes.

³³ For a similar construction, see 2 Kings 22:14.

³⁴ As prophetess, she is the one who is acted on by the Spirit of Yahweh (cf. Num. 11:29; 24:2; 2 Sam. 23:2; 1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16), and as the one who stirs Barak to action, who supports him in carrying out his mission, and who sends him into battle, she effects in this event what elsewhere in Judges is effected by the Spirit (3:10; 6:40; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14).

³⁵ Date palms grew profusely in the Jordan Valley (Jericho was known as the City of Palms, Deut. 34:3; Judg. 1:16; 3:13) and at oases (Ex. 15:27; Num. 3:9) but could also be found in the hill country by springs or in gardens where cultivated (*ZPEB*, s.v. "Palm Tree," by W. E. Shewell-Cooper).

³⁶ *IDB*, s.v. "Palm Tree," by J. C. Trevor.

³⁷ That dates were used for food in Palestine cannot be doubted, but explicit reference to this fruit is absent in the Old Testament, unless, as is likely, it is included in references to honey and raisins (see Shewell-Cooper, "Palm Tree").

³⁸ Sweetness and honey(comb) were conventional metaphors for that which provided benefits, delight and refreshment (Job 21:33; Pss. 19:10; 55:14; 19:103; Prov. 3:24; 9:17; 13:19; 16:24; 20:17; 24:13-14; 27:7; Eccles. 5:12; 11:7; Song of Sol. 2:3,14; 4:11; 5:1, 16; cf. 1 Sam. 14:27, 29; Ps. 81:16; Ezek. 16:13).

³⁹ James S. Ackerman has plausibly argued that this account of Deborah's commissioning of Barak fits the call schema detected by W. Richter (*Die sogenannte vorprophetischen Berufungsberichte* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1970]) elsewhere in the Old Testament. The schema is composed of five elements: (1) allusion to distress, (2) commission (to go and act), (3) objection (by the one commissioned), (4) assurance (that God will be with the one commissioned), and (5) a sign (confirming the promise). See "Prophecy and Warfare in Early Israel: A Study of the Deborah-Barak Story," *BASOR* 220 (1975): 5-13. But even if such a schema did exist as a stereotype form (whatever its genesis), it here provides only a part of the skeleton of the narrative; it does not affect the artistry.

⁴⁰ This is surely the "city of refuge" mentioned in Josh. 20:7.

⁴¹ Like Judah later (15:11) but in contrast to Othniel and Ehud. Ackerman's conclusion ("Prophecy," p. 11) that, because of the holy war ideology of premonarchic Israel, no military leader would have (or could be expected to have) initiated a war in behalf of the tribes without an express commission from Yahweh (probably in a cultic situation) is based on such a long chain of questionable hypotheses that it cannot be taken seriously. His explanations for the absence of this factor in the cases of Othniel, Ehud, and Jephthah are lame. Moreover, the author of Judges certainly did not so understand the situation. The introduction to his work (1:1—3:6) clearly indicates that he interpreted this period in the light of the ministries of Moses and Joshua as these are presented in Deuteronomy and Joshua. On his view Israel was under standing orders to conquer and hold the land in Yahweh's name and had Yahweh's standing promise to be with them in this undertaking, if they remained faithful to Him. Moreover, it appears significant that whereas Othniel and Ehud needed no special commission from Yahweh, Barak did, and he responded hesitantly. So did Gideon, who required a series of special signs to confirm Yahweh's commission and promise (6:36-40; 7:9-15). In the days of Jephthah no one in Israel would take the lead (10:18), so the Israelites sent for an outlaw chief they had earlier expelled from the land. And Samson could be drawn into conflict with the Philistines only through his passion for Philistine women. Meanwhile, the Judahites would remain cravenly subservient to the Philistines (15:9-13). It seems clear enough that this progressive degeneration in Israel is one of the author's themes.

⁴² See, e.g., 1 Sam. 23:19.

⁴³ This is because the action here refers to assembling a force to do battle, not to immediate preparation for attack.

⁴⁴ R. C. Boling so renders the verb there, and also here and in v. 7 (*Judges*, AB [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975], pp. 95-96, 287); see also J. A. Soggin, *Judges* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), pp. 65, 296. Its usual sense is to draw (as with a cord or rope: Isa. 5:18; Hos. 11:4; or with love: Song of Sol. 1:4; Jer. 31:3; or to draw a bow: often), to drag off (Jer. 31:3; Ezek. 32:20), to prolong (Pss. 36:10; 85:5; Isa. 13:22), or to extend (Ps. 109:12). In Job 21:33 the verb seems to refer to forming a processional line, as F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman recognize in *Hosea*, AB (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), p. 458. If that sense is applicable here, Barak would be commanded to draw a procession of fighting men with him (that is, lead them) to Mount Tabor.

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⁴⁵ Cf. Abraham (Gen. 14:14) and Jephthah (Judg. 11:3).

⁴⁶ Chapter 5 speaks of a broader tribal assemblage. It may be that Deborah summoned others also, as she had Barak, but that Barak was commissioned to muster the two tribes most directly affected and that this formed the major Israelite contingent.

⁴⁷ Alonzo-Schökel's suggestion that the author here employs an ironical wordplay on Barak (lightning) and "go" is undoubtedly right ("Erzählkunst," p.160).

⁴⁸ The LXX has an expanded text at this point, reflecting precisely this concern that reads "For I do not know the day on which the Lord will prosper the angel with me," which probably represents a *Vorlage* that could better have been rendered: "For I do not know the day on which the angel of the Lord will cause me to prosper [succeed]." However, attempts to validate this expanded form of the text (see, e.g., Ackerman, "Prophecy," p. 10) are not very convincing. Nowhere is the angel of Yahweh the subject of the presumed verb (*sālah*), which may account for the improbable LXX rendering. And the more likely idiom for the author here would have been "prosper my way (*darkî*)," cf. v 9; 18:5; see also Gen. 24:56; Deut. 28:29; Josh. 1:8; Ps. 37:7; Isa. 48:15.

⁴⁹ For this participle expressing present action see Gen. 24:42; 28:20; Deut. 1:33; Judg. 14:3; 18:5; Ps. 101:6; Isa. 65:2.

⁵⁰ Hebrew *mākar* (sell) and *nātan* (give, cf. v. 7) are often synonymous, but the former, being more vivid, sharpens the contrast between the original promise and its present revision.

⁵¹ As Murray acutely observes in "Narrative Structure," p.175.

⁵² It is fruitless to speculate concerning whether Deborah thinks or knows more than she says.

⁵³ Noted already by Murray ("Narrative Structure," p.170). The idiom occurs a number of times elsewhere (Judg. 5:15; 1 Sam. 25:27; 2 Sam. 15:16-18; 1 Kings 20:10; 2 Kings 3:9-not always in the sense "under... command") but is much less common than *aḥārāyw*, which the author uses in v. 14. It is also the normal idiom for going "on foot" (Ex. 12:11; Num. 20:19; Deut. 2:28; Ps. 66:6).

⁵⁴ Alonzo-Schökel's perplexity over the placement of v. 11 (shared by most commentators) and Murray's elaborate explanations are unnecessary. (Lindars, who shows no awareness of the studies by Alonzo-Schökel and Murray, follows the more traditional course of dismissing v 11 as a bit of Deuteronomistic editing ["Deborah's Song," p. 163 n. 11].) The author had good narrative reasons to place it just here and to formulate it as he did, naming Heber the Kenite first and Kadesh as his place of encampment last.

⁵⁵ The "Oak in Zaananim" is mentioned also in Josh. 19:33, where it is assigned to the tribe of Naphtali, but its precise location is unknown.

⁵⁶ See Gen. 12:6; 13:18; 18:1; Judg. 6:11, 19; 9:6, 37; 1 Kings 14:23; 16:4; Isa. 1:29; 57:5; Ezek. 6:13; 20:28; Hos. 4:13.

⁵⁷ Examples could be multiplied. See, e.g., Gen. 15:18; 20:12, 24; 21:34; 27:12; Deut. 9:23; Josh. 6:2; Judg. 1:2; 7:9, 14-15; 18:10.

⁵⁸ See also Num. 10:35; Josh. 10:11-14; 2 Sam. 5:24; 22:8-20; Ps. 68:17-18; Hab. 3:8-15.

⁵⁹ Ex. 14:24; 23:27; Deut. 2:15; Josh. 10:10; Judg. 4:15; 1 Sam. 22:15; Pss. 18:14; 144:6.

⁶⁰ Or its symbolic representation, as in Ex. 14:24.

⁶¹ See also Ps. 97:2-3.

⁶² A duplicate of 2 Sam. 22.

⁶³ Therefore many have posited a textual corruption (either dittography of the following *lipnê bārāq* or an accidental anticipation of the same phrase in v. 16). But *hāmam lipnê* is also rare, found only in Josh. 10:10, unless *hāmam* controls the preposition in 1 Sam. 7:10. Even *nāpal lēpi hereb* (v. 16) is unusual, found elsewhere only in Josh. 8:24 (in a clause not found in LXX). It seems best, therefore, to accept the unanimous text tradition as transmitted.

⁶⁴ See the structural analysis above.

⁶⁵ See the structural analysis above.

⁶⁶ See Judg. 15:18; 2 Sam. 24:14; Lam. 1:7.

⁶⁷ The author names the destinations at which they arrived, not the goals they were pursuing. Barak had no special interest in Harosheth Haggoyim; he was pursuing Sisera (or so he thought). When Sisera fled the Kishon, it was no doubt Heber's protection he sought; he ended up in Jael's tent.

⁶⁸ Alonzo-Schökel rightly suggests that Jael's "going out to meet" Sisera was purposeful; he points to Gen. 30:16; Prov. 7:10, 15 as parallels ("Erzählkunst," p.163).

John H. Stek, "The Bee and the Mountain Goat: A Literary Reading of Judges 4," Walter C. Kaiser & Ronald F. Youngblood, eds., *A Tribute to Gleason Archer. Essays on the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986. Hbk. ISBN: 0802487807. Chapter 3. pp. 53-86.

⁶⁹ Cf. Gen. 19:2, where Lot rises to meet the angels that have come to investigate Sodom and says to them, "Sirs, turn aside to your servant's house."

⁷⁰ The parallels and contrasts are striking: Deborah summons Barak, addresses him with an imperative, and motivates him with a promise; Sisera comes to Jael, she addresses him with an imperative, and she motivates him with a (implied) promise.

⁷¹ The meaning of Hebrew *sēmikâ* is uncertain, but the context suggests concealment rather than comfort as the purpose. Does the author intend by paronomasia to link and contrast the acts of Deborah and Jael here? Having summoned Barak, Deborah commands him to *māšak* the tribes, an act that will make him a very public figure. Jael invites Sisera into her tent and covers him with a *sēmikâ*, which conceals him.

⁷² As did Abraham, when three strangers appeared at his tent (Gen. 18:8). It was no doubt goat milk that she brought him (Prov. 27:27). Burney's suggestion (*Judges*, p. 93) that the drink referred to was strongly soporific is intriguing but seems hardly supported by Gen. 18:8. References in the Old Testament emphasize rather its refreshing and nourishing effects (see, e.g., Song of Sol. 5:1; Isa. 7:22; 55:1; 60:1; Ezek. 25:4; Joel 3:18).

⁷³ Just as Ruth approached Boaz (Ruth 3:7).

⁷⁴ The Hebrew noun occurs only in this context (see also v. 22; 5:26) and in Song of Sol. 4:3; 6:7. It is uncertain as to precisely what part of the head it refers to (see the commentaries).

⁷⁵ Another rare word (elsewhere only 1:14 and its parallel, Josh. 15:1), but context indicates the generally accepted sense.

⁷⁶ *Wattiqqah ... wattāsem ... wattābō' ... wattitga' ... wattīṣnah.*

⁷⁷ *Wēhū' nirdām wayyā 'ap wayyāmôt.*

⁷⁸ The usual custom after a victory, cf. 1 Sam. 17:53; 31:8; 2 Chron. 20:25.

⁷⁹ The Hebrew verb can signify either, but the imperative usage for "come" is relatively rare (see Num. 22:6,11, 17; 23:7; Judg. 9:14; Isa. 55:1, 3) and thus the more remarkable here.

⁸⁰ See n. 44 above.

⁸¹ Failure to give context its due has led to strange conclusions. Both Murray and Lindars, for example, propose that the present narrative has a feminist theme. That is to ignore even the stereotype frame within which the story is set. It is also to diminish the significance of the plot and its relationship to the plots of the other narratives in the central cycle. In all these accounts, however, theme and plot are tightly bound together. All have to do with the politics of the kingdom of God. To suggest otherwise is to trivialize them.

⁸² See also n. 41 above.

⁸³ Cf. 3:20-21; 7:20; see also by contrast Yahweh's word to Gideon (7:2) and the testimonies of Jonathan (1 Sam. 14:6) and David (1 Sam. 17:36-37).

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