

The Triumphal Ode

(The Ode of Deborah)

Alice Elzinga

Judges five

In the opening paragraph of his volume, *Poetry of the Old Testament*, Professor Dr. Sanford C. Yoder writes: "Hidden away in the Old Testament and scattered throughout its books is a type of literature that until recently has received scant attention and has been little understood ---- the poetry of the Bible." (I might add here that an interest in Old Testament Poetry was first awakened in the mind and soul of Dr. Yoder while he was a student at the University of Iowa where a course was offered in *The English Bible as Literature*. Dr. Yoder is at present, Professor of Old Testament Poetry at Goshen College.)

Indeed the Old Testament has within its pages a mine of literary wealth. But in order to study with maximum profit this most loftiest of all literature one needs to have some knowledge and understanding of the people who produced it and the land in which they lived and worked and worshipped. I would suggest that the reader has a topographical map of Palestine at hand while reading the following article.

The *dress* of poetry comes from the country where the poet lives. Someone has said;

"If you the poet would understand,
You must dwell in the poet's land."

This, ofcourse, is not always possible, but through research and study one can form a mental picture of, "the poet's land."

Nordic songs have the background of snow mountains, icy fjords and the accompaniment of the storm wind. Tales of the Tropics are told in the twilight under the whispering palm trees. The poem or story is the

child born out of its own time and clime, it is well to understand something of the circumstances and surroundings of its birth if we would see its beauty. Figures of speech arise spontaneously from experience, and the word paintings of the author are of the scenes his eyes beheld.

All really great literature is basically a sharing of experiences. Professor Oscar Campwell, professor of English Literature at the University of Michigan from 1921 to 1935, said in an address given at Columbia University on October 31, 1935; "An artist *writes about the life he knows* as nature dictates, in an idiom which his audiences will learn to understand. These are the first principles, not of defeat, but of the author's success. All literary achievement must be *rooted* in the author's experience."

The Triumphal Ode, Deborah's spontaneous poem is, a result of a personal experience. For the study of the Ode I have chosen the use of the *Revised Standard Version*. For as Dr. Barclay writes in his *Introducing the Bible*, "Much as we love the Authorized Version as a monument of English prose, much as we rest our hearts in its music and in its cadences, we cannot do anything other than recognize that in the twentieth century it is no longer an adequate translation. For the purpose of study we must use either the Revised Standard Version or the New English Bible" (page 106)

The Ode of Deborah belongs to *Epic Poetry*. The epic poet describes the actors and their deeds as he sees them and makes us see them. This is in contrast with the *dramatic poet* who presents the actors before us and let them speak and act for themselves.

The word *Ode* is related to the Greek *audē*--voice. An *ode* is usually marked by exhaltation of feeling, style, varying length of line and complexity of stanza form. Linguistic scholars agree that the literary style, poetic parallelism, majestic tone and spontaneity of this Ode, meets all the requirements of classic literature. Says Professor Brewer of Columbia University; "This Triumphal Ode by Deborah belongs in the judgement of critics to the finest Odes in the literature of the world and is not excelled in poetic power by any of the later war songs." (*The Literature of the Old Testament*, page 6.)

Historical Background and geographical setting.

The story of Deborah is given in prose as well as in the poem. Chapter four gives the prose, followed by chapter five, which is, the Ode, in the book of Judges. The book of Judges is the seventh book in the Bible.

From ancient times, that is after the Jews returned from Egypt, the country of Israel was divided among twelve tribes. On the *East side* of the river Jordan, in the *north*, the half tribe of Mannasah, in the *center*, Gad, and in the *south*, the tribe of Reuben. On the *West side* of the Jordan, in the *north* Naphtali, Asher and Zebulon. In the center of the country, the half tribe of Mannasah, Issachar, Ephraim, Benjamin and Dan. In the South, the two tribes, Simeon and Judah. (*Please study the map.*) The two tribes of the south, Judah and Simeon are not mentioned in the Ode.

The Syrian armies came down from the north and occupied the areas of the northren tribes, Asher, Naphtali, Zebulon and Issachar. Travel through occupied areas had become dangerous. People escaped into caves and into the desert. The northren tribes had been reduced to slavery under severe "oppression" of the Syrians. There was a state of fear and weakness throughout Israel on the west side of the river Jordan.

The Syrian armies, under the capable leadership of (king) Sisera, were well supplied with weapons of war and had "900 chariots of iron." All weapons which the Israelites did possess had been taken away by the enemy.

It was under these conditions that a woman, Deborah by name, heard the call of Jehovah, the God of Israel, "to arise" and deliver her people. This woman was a prophetess, a counselor and a leader in the area of Central Israel. She lived among the people of the tribe of Benjamin, between two towns, Bethel and Ramah. But Deborah was a woman of *action* as well as counseling. She was a woman who's heart was with her suffering people.

Secretly Deborah summoned to her side a former leader of Israel's army, Barak by name. Barak was a native of one of the northren oppressed tribes. He too felt the urgency for deliverance of his people. Deborah and Barak had their secret meetings. They planned to call up

as many men out of all Israel as they could possibly get together. This was a most difficult task. However, Barak succeeded in forming an army of about ten thousand men. But these men had no war weapons. They came with whatever they could find. When all arrangements had been made and the season just ripe for it, Deborah told Barak to gather his men near Mount Tabor, which would also be near the valley of Megiddo, the plains of Esdraelon. (The International Christian Commentary states that the active battle took place about 10 to 15 miles from Mount Tabor — see the map.)

The river Kishon, with its source from Mount Carmel, runs through this valley. The river becomes a raging torrent and overflow its banks during the spring season when the snow on Mount Carmel melts and the spring rains pour down. The valley of Megiddo and the plains of Esdraelon become an impassable morass and particularly dangerous for the "900 chariots of iron." It was, apparently, Deborah's plan to "draw out Sisera's mighty army into this plain." It was a tremendous plan. Barak agreed with this plan, but he wishes Deborah to accompany him in this campaign against the enemy, to counsel and inspire the men. Barak exhibited weakness in faith, but Deborah showed great courage; she answered: "I will surely go with you." She added prophetically: "And the glory of the expedition will not be yours, for Jehovah shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman."

The battle took place as planned. The mighty army of Sisera was defeated. His heavy armed men and his "chariots of iron" got stuck in the waters and morass of the valley and plain. Sisera fled to the north to a neutral tribe, the Kenites. He entered the tent of Jael. The great Sisera was all but spent from the battle and from the flight. He said: "Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink, for I am thirsty." Jael opened a bottle of milk and gave him drink, seeming to be more generous than his request. Again he said: "Stand in the door of the tent and it shall be when any man doth come and inquire of thee, and say: 'Is there any man here?' that thou shalt say: 'No'" He lay down wrapped in the mantle or blanket which she had given him, exhausted. Then Jael took a tent peg and a mallet (hammer made of wood), in her hand, she drove the tent peg through

the temple of Sisera as he slept, and he died at her feet.

At the close of the Ode we see Sisera's mother waiting in front of the lattice window, surrounded by her court ladies. Professor Bewer writes; "All the gusto of deliverance of suffering and savage exploits has been poured into the Ode."

A contradiction with social standing for women

Deborah was the moving spirit in Israel. But a woman ruler in Israel was a very extra-ordinary thing. In ancient times women were not highly respected. Women had to limit their activities to the chores in and around the house. She had no voice in the temple, or in politics. Yet Deborah had been accepted as the "mouth-piece of Jehovah." Her great wisdom was recognized by the people. From the historical background we learned how, with wisdom she made her plans. Gifted with this rare gift of wisdom and her great love, a sacrificial love for her suffering people and her staunch faith in Jehovah, these were the pillars for her courage.

She was a true "Mother in Israel." A mother cannot allow her children to remain in bondage and slavery. She roused her countrymen to fight and in the name of Jehovah promised victory. These were the characteristics of the woman who so spontaneously gave us the Triumphal Ode recorded in Judges 5, commonly called: The Ode of Deborah.

"The book of Judges is the record during a period of about 1200 B.C to about 1000 B.C. The chronicle was compiled from several fragmentary sources. The oldest strands are perhaps as old as 1000 B.C. Due to this age and also due to some illegible passages and translations, a few lines in the Ode are obscure." (International Critical Commentary, pages 128-129.)

The Ode of Deborah

Prelude

1. "Then sang Deborah and Barak
the son of Abinoam on that day":
2. "That the leaders took the lead in Israel,

- that the people offered themselves willingly,
bless the Lord!"
3. "Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes;
to the Lord I will sing,
I will make melody to the Lord,
the God of Israel."
4. "Lord, when thou didst go forth from Seir,
when thou didst march from the region of Edom,
the earth trembled,
and the heavens dropped.
yea, the clouds dropped water."
5. "The mountains quaked before the Lord,
yon Sinai before the Lord,
the God of Israel."

The Oppression 6-11

6. "In the days of Shamgär son of Anath,
in the days of Jael, caravans ceased
and travelers kept to the byways."
7. "The peasantry ceased in Israel,
they ceased
untill you arose, Deborah,
arose as a mother in Israel."
8. "When new gods were chosen,
then war was in the gates.
Was shield or spear to be seen
among forty thousand in Israel?"
9. "My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel
who offered themselves willingly
among the people.
Bless the Lord."
10. (scholars do not agree on the contents of the lines)
11. "To the sound of musicians
at the watering places,

there they repeat the triumphs
of the Lord.
the triumph of his peasantry in Israel.
Then down to the gates
marched the people of the Lord.”

Call to resist the Oppressors, 12–23

12. “Awake, awake, Deborah!
Awake, awake, utter a song!
Arise, Barak, lead away your captives,
O son of Abinoam.”
13. “Then down marched the remnant of the noble;
the people of the Lord
marched down for him against the mighty.”
14. “From Ephraim they set out thither
into the valley,
following you, Benjamin,
with your kinsmen;
from Mächir marched down the commanders,
and from Zebulon
those who bear the marshal’s staff;”
15. “the princes of Issachär came with Deborah,
and Issachär faithful to Barak;
into the valley
they rushed forth at his heels.”

Rebuke to those who did not respond to the call

- “Among the clans of Reuben
there were great searchings of heart.”
16. “Why did you tarry among the sheepfolds,
to hear the piping for the flocks?
Among the clans of Reuben
there were great searchings of heart.”
17. “Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan;

and Dan,
why did he abide with the ships?
Asher sat still at the coast of the sea.
settling down by his landings."

Praise for those who responded to the call

18. "Zebulon is a people
that jeopardized their lives to the death;
Naphtali too,
on the heights of the field."
19. "The kings came, they fought;
then fought the kings of Canaan,
at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo;
they got no spoils of silver."

Intervention of Jehovah to discomfit the enemy

20. "From heaven fought the stars,
from their courses they fought against Sisera."
21. "The torrent Kishon swept them away,
the onrushing torrent,
the torrent Kishon.
22. "March on, my soul, with might!
with the galloping,
galloping of his steeds."

The flight and death of Sisera

23. "Curse Meroz, says the angel of the Lord,
curse bitterly its inhabitants,
because they came not to the help of the Lord,
to the help of the Lord against the mighty."
24. "Most blessed of women, be Jael,
the wife of Heber the Kenite,
of tent-dwelling women most blessed."
25. "He asked water and she gave him milk,

-
- she brought him curds in a lordly bowl.”
26. “She put her hand to the tent peg
and her right hand to the workmen’s mallet;
She struck Sisera a blow,
she crushed his head,
she shattered and pierced his temple.”
27. “He sank, he fell,
he lay still at her feet;
at her feet he sank, he fell;
where he sank, there he fell dead.”

The mother of Sisera-----waiting

28. “Out of the window she peered,
the mother of Sisera
gazed through the lattice;”
“Why is his chariot so long in coming?
why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots?”
29. “Her wisest ladies make answer,
nay, she gives answer to herself.”
30. “Are they not finding and dividing the spoil?----
A maiden or two for every man;
spoil of dyed stuffs embroidered,
two pieces of dyed work embroidered
for my neck as spoil?”
31. “So perish all thine enemies,
O Lord!
But thy friends be like the sun
as he rises in his might.!”

(from Revised Standard Version).

Analysis of the Ode of Deborah;

Parallelism and asyndetons are characteristics of all ancient and classic poetry. We find these characteristics repeatedly in the Ode. These will be pointed out in the discussion. (asyndetons; omission of conjunctions)

Already I mentioned that an Ode usually is marked by varying length of line and complexity of stanza form and often causes grammatical difficulties. We will not concern ourselves with these difficulties. Our concern will be centered on the *meaning* of the Ode and literary peculiarities.

Following the introduction of stanza 1, Deborah announces the *theme*, which is: Magnify Jehovah, the Lord, and gratitude towards those who answered the call. This theme is repeated in stanza 9.

2. "That the leaders took the lead in Israel,
that the people offered themselves willingly,
Bless the Lord!"

9. "My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel
who offered themselves willingly
among the people.
Bless the Lord."

In stanza 3, Deborah calls upon the kings and princes, the rulers of the nations of the world, so far as they were within the horizon of the poet's contemporaries, to listen to her *theme*;

"Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes;
to the Lord I will sing,
I will make melody to the Lord,
the God of Israel."

It draws our admiration that the poet does not give glory to herself, not glory for men, but all honor to Him who gave the seasons and opened the heavens at just the right time. And she wants the world to know this.

We are introduced to parallelism; *to the Lord I will sing*, I will make *melody to the Lord*. And the two words, *hear* and *give ear*, also presents good parallelism. The two verbs, *hear* and *give ear* are often coupled in classic poetic parallelism. Or *hear* and *hearken* as forinstance in Genesis 4: 23, "----- hear my voice----- hearken to what I say." and in Numbers 23: 18, Rise, Balak, and hear; hearken to me-----. "And again in Exodus 15:16, "If thou wilt dilligently hearken-----and wilt give ear to his commandment-----"

3 and 4. "Lord, when thou didst go forth from Seir
when thou didst march from the region of Edom,

the earth trembled,
 and the heavens dropped,
 yea, the clouds dropped water."
 "The mountains quaked before the Lord,
 yon Sinai before the Lord
 the God of Israel."

Notice again the parallelism; in this case, *identical* parallelism.

-----when thou didst go forth-----
 -----when thou didst march from-----
 -----the heavens dropped-----
 -----the clouds dropped water-----
 -----before the Lord-----
 -----before the Lord-----

The poet seems to describe in her imagination, the coming of the Lord from His ancient seat, mount Sinai, for the specific purpose of delivering His people. It was on mount Sinai that the Lord gave the Decalogue (Ten Commandments, Exodus 20.) Mount Sinai had a very special place in the hearts and minds of the people. By mentioning Mount Sinai, Deborah recalls the great faithfulness of Jehovah.

Stanza 6 to 8; *The state of things before the uprising.* The actual situation was near unbearable. Travel on the usual caravan highways had become dangerous. Travelers were constrained to take round-about ways. Armed bands were making life unsafe. The peasants were compelled to leave their unprotected villages and hide in caves. The poet does not merely state the insecurity of the land, but she wants her hearers to know that *it was this condition which caused the uprising against Sisera.* Her people were in bondage. This was a *just cause to call for deliverance.* The words in stanza 7,----- until you arose, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel--" gives the hearer just a glimpse of the tremendous burden which the poet had upon her heart and mind.

6. "In the days of Shamgär, son of Anath,
 in the days of Jael, caravans ceased
 and travelers kept to the byways."

7. "The peasantry ceased in Israel,

they ceased
untill you arose, Deborah,
arose a mother in Israel.”

8. -----

“Was shield or spear to be seen
among forty thousand in Israel?”

Compared with the well equipped soldiers of Sisera, the men of Israel were armed with rude weapons as each man could lay his hands on. The “forty thousand” refers to Israel’s army *before* the occupation. Barak was able to gather only about ten thousand men.

The first two lines of stanza 8, are most interesting;

“When new gods were chosen
then war was in the gates.”

These two lines are like an *apostrophe*, that is to say, a *digression* from the discourse. It is an half poetic expression divided by a *caesura*, that is, a break in the flow of *sound* in the middle of a stanza. It has no direct connection with the preceding line, nor with the following line. It is a sudden interruption, a flash. It seems that the poet is asking the unspoken question; “But why is our country in this state of oppression and suffering? Could the answer be, Unfaithfulness to the Lord of Mount Sinai?”

In stanza 9, the poet picks up the discourse again by repeating the *theme*. See stanza 2. Notice how Deborah was filled with admiration for those who volunteered to serve notwithstanding the great odds against them.

Stanza 10 has been omitted. It is so mutilated due to translations that the International Critical Commentary states; “It is better to pass over in silence.”

11. “To the sound of musicians
at the watering places
there they repeat the triumphs
of the Lord,
the triumph of his peasantry in Israel.
Then down to the gates
marched the people of the Lord.”

Notice the very *positive* atmosphere. The deliverance has already taken place, but in the discourse so far, the hearer does not know about a deliverance, It is as if the poet is running ahead of herself. She is bubbling over with joy. The people had not been able to gather around the village water wells. But *now* they have returned, and are sharing and rejoicing in the triumph of the Lord.

In ancient times, the water wells were places to meet the peasantry. It was the community gathering place. It was at these "watering places" that the poet sees the people, while drawing water for their flocks and cattle, rehearsing the good news of triumph.

But even more. The poet sees in this prophetic vision villages and towns reinhabited. The people have come home. "Then down to the gates marched the people of the Lord." "Gates," that is, to their towns and homes.

In stanza 12, comes *the call to resist the oppressors*,

„Awake, awake, Deborah!

Awake, awake, utter a song!

Arise, Barak, lead away your captives,

O son of Abinoam."

It is a positive call coupled with a bold prolepsis, (anticipation) but not unnatural for a poet with Deborah's characteristics. Before her mental eye she follows the men marching to the valley of Megiddo. Swift and certain the victory is gained. "Utter a song----lead away your captives." There is no doubt in her mind of what will take place. This apostrophe is directed to the two leaders; to Deborah, (herself) to fire the hearts of her country men by song; to Barak to make prisoners his aim, "lead away your captives."

Barak's native home was in the north. Now the time had finally arrived to avenge for himself as well as for his people. There is a welcome personal touch, "--- lead away *your* captives---"

"Lead away---captives," seem to indicate that there was not to be any unnecessary killing and bloodshed. The avenging was not to be turned into cruelty. Barak was to make *prisoners his aim*.

Stanza 13, to 15, describes the people representing the various tribes who responded to the call. They were placed under the leadership of Barak, and nobles. "Mächir," stands for Mannasah.

13. "Then down marched the remnant of the noble;
the people of the Lord
marched down for him against the mighty.
14. "From Ephraim they set out thither
into the valley,
following you, Benjamin,
with your kinsmen;
from Mächir marched down the commanders,
and from Zebulon
those who bear the marshal's staff;
15. "the princes of Issachär came with Deborah,
and Issachär faithful to Barak;
into the valley
they rushed forth at his heels."

The people responded heroically. The poet takes full recognition of their valor and bravery.

Repeated reference is made to: "down marched---marched down--into the valley---" This is not only poetic parallelism, but it also refers to the geography and nature of the country. Palestine is a country of hills and valleys and plains. The people came down from the hills and mountain slopes, gathering together in the plain of Esdraelon.

The word, "remnant," in the first line of stanza 13, designates the "smallness" of the group in comparison with the mighty army of Sisera.

But in contrast with the heroic people there were others. The following lines, (15b, 16 and 17) are lines of stern rebuke;

- 15b. Among the clans of Reuben
there were great searchings of heart.
16. Why did you tarry among the sheepfolds,
to hear the piping for the flock?
Among the clans of Reuben
there were great searchings of heart.

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17. "Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan;
and Dan,
why did he abide with the ships?
Asher sat still at the coast of the sea,
settling down by his landings"

The ancient words of Cain, come to mind; "--am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4: 9). Reuben's people discussed the matter, but wasted their time in the process of weighing the pros and the cons. Their final decision was to stay with their flocks, mind their own business. After all, the enemy had not occupied their fertile grass lands. What could they gain by joining the battle in the north? Gilead, Dan and Asher also pursued their own interests while their brothers were fighting the good fight for deliverance. Deborah's words were stern and sharp, but she does not linger long with this thought. After the few, stern lines, she quickly turns to praise for those who "jeopardied their lives to the death."

18. "Zebulon is a people
that jeopardied their lives to the death;
Naphtali too,
on the heights of the field.
19. "The kings came, they fought;
then fought the kings of Canaan,
at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo;
they got no spoils of silver."

Special tribute is given to Zebulon and Naphtali. The cowardly conduct of those who remained with their sheep or with their ships is contrasted sharply with the shining example of Zebulon and Naphtali. The tribes of Mannasah and Benjamin too were mentioned in stanza 14, for their bravery. And Issachâr had provided "commanders," hurrying from their mountain homes to join the people.

Stanza 19, introduces the battle. "The kings came, they fought: -----" Apparently the enemy had been "drawn out" by the ten thousand un-armed men of the tribes of Israel, as Deborah and Barak had planned. "Kings" is in the plural form. It seems to indicate that several feudal lords and nomadic leaders had joined the men of Sisera into the valley

of Megiddo.

“----- they got no spoils of silver.” This line refers to the futility of the efforts by the enemy. Their campaign was most profitable for the Israelites, but unprofitable for Sisera and his men.

Notice the effect of the asyndeton in stanza 19; “The kings came, they fought-----”And the parallelism; “The kings -----fought---then fought the kings.” Two poetical characteristics within two lines.

In 20 and 21, we see in figurative speech, *the intervention of Jehovah to discomfit the enemy.*

20. “From heaven fought the stars
from their courses they fought against Sisera.

21. “The torrent Kishon swept them away,
the onrushing torrent
the torrent Kishon.”

The very stars took part in the fight-----a magnificent poetical way of saying that all of the forces of the universe responded. It was hopeless for Sisera and his men to fight against the Lord of the universe. The poet wants to make clear that the Lord was in control, He was at work. Not only the valour of the men of Israel who responded to the call, and not the planning of Deborah and Barak, but it was the Lord who made nature respond to the needs of the brave.

The river Kishon fed by melting snow from mount Carmel, and the spring rains, was overflowing its banks and the valley turned into one great morass. This proved fatal to the chariots, horses and men of Sisera. (notice again the parallelism).

22. The frantic efforts to escape, horses and their riders. “----- galloping of his steeds.” An abrupt ending. No details about the actual battle. It was not necessary. The waters rose, the valley a morass, the chariots stuck, those who were able to gallop away made use of this way of escape, and the battle is further left to the imagination.

The flight and death of Sisera receive the attention in the lines of stanza 23-27;

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23. "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord.
Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof;
Because they came not to the help of the Lord
to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

The position of these lines seem to indicate that the messenger of the Lord condemns the people of Meroz, not because of their failure in supporting the tribes of Israel, but because *they failed assistance in destroying the enemy*. Just where Meroz is located is unknown. Do these lines suggest that the people from Meroz assisted Sisera in his flight?

In contrast with the failure of the people of Meroz the fearless courage of the woman Jael stands out double brave, whether we sympathize with the method which she used to destroy the enemy or not, her act was an act of bravery.

24. "Most blessed of women, be Jael,
the wife of Heber the Kenite,
of tent-dwelling women most blessed."
25. "He asked water and she gave him milk,
she brought him curds in a lordly bowl."
26. "She put her hand to the tent peg
and her right hand to the workmen's mallet;
She struck Sisera a blow,
she crushed his head,
she shattered and pierced his temples."
27. "He sank, he fell,
he lay still at her feet;
at her feet he sank, he fell;
where he sank, there he fell dead."

After giving thanks to the Lord, "blessed----be---", the poet transplants the hearer before the door of Jael's tent, where Sisera was resting before his continued flight. He asked water, but she gave him milk. The pronouns in the lines of 25 and 26 are very effective; no need to name the actors by name in this tragedy. Notice the effect of the asyndeton in the swift succession of the verbs, especially in the lines of stanza 27. Also the consistent use of parallelism.

These are the closing lines of the drama inside the tent of Jael. The poet does not waste words on details. From the tent the poet quickly moves to the following scene in Sisera's palace. There before the lattice window, his mother is anxiously waiting for her son's return.

28. "Out of the window she peered,
the mother of Sisera
gazed through the lattice;
Why is his chariot so long in coming?
why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots?"
29. "Her wisest ladies make answer,
nay, she gives answer to herself."
30. "Are they not finding and dividing the spoil?
A maiden or two for every man;
spoil of dyed stuffs embroidered,
two pieces of dyed work embroidered
for my neck as spoil?"

There is tragic irony----- almost matchless irony. A mother waiting for her son's victorious return, which will never take place. In the line, "-----nay, she gives answer to herself," the anxious mother catches at a straw of hope, a hope which will soon be crushed.

The lines of 28-30 are lines of deep emotion, pity and compassion. The face at the lattice window; the feverish hours of waiting for the homecoming hero, her son; the optimistic confidence of the ladies of her court -----all this is portrayed with great skill. The light hearted anticipation of the ladies form a striking contrast to the ill suppressed forebodings of the mother.

"There is nothing in literature more perfect in its kind than those lines," writes Dr. Driver, Professor of Ancient Literature.

With consummate art the poet breaks off, leaving to the imagination of the listeners the terrible revelation of the truth.

30. "So perish all thine enemies,
O Lord!
But thy friends be like the sun
as he rises in his might!"

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