

formulate this brilliant, and at first sight attractive hypothesis, the only one which has any probative power is that relating to Havilah; that, however, is hampered by some difficulties of its own, and certainly cannot, in the presence of so much hypothetical and hostile evidence, bear the whole weight of the theory. The necessary conclusion is that Professor Delitzsch has not satisfactorily answered the question, Where did the conception of the Hebrew writer of Gen. II., 8-14 place Eden and its garden?

THE BLESSING OF Jael.

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“Blessed above women be Jael
The wife of Heber the Kenite.
Above women in the tent blessed.
Water he asked, milk she gave.
In a dish of the nobles she offered him curds.
Her hand she outstretched to the tent pin,
And her right hand to the hammer of the workmen
And hammered Sisera, and smote his head,
And beat and struck through his temples.
Between her feet he bowed, he fell he lay,
Between her feet he bowed, he fell;
Where he bowed there he fell down slaughtered.”
Judges v., 24-27.

That the death of Sisera by the hand of Jael should hold a leading place in the song of Deborah is most natural. A fulfillment of the previous prophecy,¹ it was a grand vindication of the divine commission of the prophetess. Its praise also was to the just humiliation of the men of Israel who had hesitated when bidden to go forward, and to whose leader Deborah had been forced to say: “The journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honor.” Woman had been stronger than man, and to woman belonged the praise.

But, from a moral standpoint, what of the blessing of Jael? At first glance it appears like the commendation of a base assassination, especially when one reads the prose narration.² Let us consider it somewhat carefully.

Is the blessing with or without divine sanction? If we take the latter view, that these words are simply Deborah's, that the inspiration of the Book of Judges guarantees nothing more than a correct

¹ Judg. iv., 9. ² Judg. iv., 18-21.

record of this song, with no endorsement of its contents, all difficulty vanishes. We have here then simply Deborah's sentiments, which we are at liberty to accept or reject. This view advanced by some¹ is untenable.

1. Because Deborah was a prophetess, and her words must be received of inspiration equal to those of any prophet. She was God's mouth-piece.

2. Because this blessing evidently depends upon a "thus saith the Lord." It is correlate to the curse of Meroz, equally an utterance of the Angel of Jehovah.

For these reasons also it cannot be regarded as the mere assertion of the fact² that Deborah was thus esteemed, nor yet as only an expression of gratitude.³ It embraces these and much more. It contains a direct divine element.

Regarding this blessing of God many⁴ have supposed that a special divine impulse or revelation was given Jael; that in good faith she received Sisera and pledged him protection, but afterwards, while she saw him sleeping, God moved her to break her word and slay him. The Lawgiver can override the law. The command of the former would annul obligation to the latter. This supposition acquits Jael of wrong, and prepares the way for the blessing. But does it not introduce another still greater difficulty? If without such a special revelation and command it would have been wrong for Jael to have slain Sisera, how was God's will communicated to her? How would she know that the impulse given her was not Satanic? Presumably it would be if it contradicted her moral nature, if it led to a violation of the moral law. And not even a miracle, Scripture teaches,⁵ would be sufficient to remove that presumption. Moreover can God be thought of as commanding one to violate the moral law, to do an act which without a special interposing order would be a base, treacherous murder. The numerous manifestations of God, his frequent communications at that time with his agents, might suggest that Jael received a divine communication, but to consider her act otherwise morally wrong and to use this as a ground of its justification, is impossible. Right and wrong are as fixed and eternal as God, for they are of God, and for him to make moral wrong right is to deny himself. He does what he wills with his creatures, but not capriciously against his will.

To treat Jael, however, with historic fairness, any motives or cir-

¹ Poole (in loco) in *Synopsis*, Dr. Hussey in *Moral Difficulties connected with the Bible*.

² Canon Farrar in *Smith's Bible Dict.* under Jael.

³ Hengstenberg, *Kingdom of God under O. T.* Vol. ii., p. 31.

⁴ Augustine, Scott, Henry, Gill, Wordsworth.

⁵ Deut. xiii., 1-5 and Gal. i., 8. See also Mozley's *Ideas of Early Ages*, p. 34.

cumstances which can be reasonably presented in her favor must be alleged.¹ Of course the outrageous conjecture of the Rabbis that Sisera offered her violence is not worthy of a consideration. But it may be assumed that Jael was a true believer in Jehovah. Her act upon this occasion and the history of her people, whether we look backward or forward, justify this assumption. Her ancestor Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, accepted the true faith.² His descendants seem to have retained it. They probably accompanied Israel into the promised land.³ They were befriended by Saul and David.⁴ Jehonadab, centuries later in the midst of a general apostasy, is conspicuous as a worshipper of Jehovah.⁵ And how gracious a divine benediction rested upon his children, the Rechabites.⁶ A child of Abraham,⁷ the cruel wrongs of captive Israel may have stirred Jael no less than Deborah. Her husband having wandered from the bulk of his people had settled near Kadesh and was allowed by Jabin to dwell in peace. No strict alliance appears to have existed between them, else why was not Heber summoned to join Sisera's host? With the cunning shrewdness of his race he seems to have held a neutral position. Or the peace may have been imposed by the conqueror upon the conquered—a peace to be broken when an opportunity should be given. The house of Heber may have had wrongs as deep as those of the house of Israel.⁸

Now we can understand why Jael slew Sisera. As a worshipper of Jehovah she felt herself obliged to. Had she been a man as a true believer she would have cut him down with the sword, as Samuel slew Agag,⁹ because he was an enemy of Jehovah, an outlaw, under the ban of the Almighty. As a nearest kinsman must avenge his fallen brother, so every child of Israel in a crisis like this was called upon to avenge the Lord's people. It was but fulfilling the old command to exterminate the Canaanite.¹⁰ Cursed was Meroz,¹¹ the city of Israel, because her people came not to the assistance of Jehovah. Blessed was Jael, the alien, the Kenite, because she did. The brave loyalty of the foreigner is conspicuous against the cowardly faithlessness of the home-born. There was a double reason also why Jael should slay Sisera. He was the leader, a host in himself, a man doubtless of tremendous energy and possibly of wickedness, especially doomed for destruction like the Canaanite leaders of the days of Joshua¹² To let him escape

¹ It is difficult to understand why Kitto (*Biblical Encyclopædia*, Jael) should impugn Jael's motives and regard the transaction as one of base, treacherous, crafty prudence. What circumstances he can he makes against her, and allows no room for justification. The mere record of the unqualified blessing in the Divine Word shows that the deed is of a higher quality.

² Exod. xviii., 11, 12. ³ Num. xxiv., 21, 22; Judg. i., 16. ⁴ 1 Sam. xv., 6; xxvii., 10; xxx., 9. ⁵ A fair inference from 2 Kgs. x., 15, 23. ⁶ Jer. xxxv., 18, 19. ⁷ The Kenites were Midianites.

⁸ See Thomson, *The Land and The Book*. Vol. ii., 147. ⁹ 1 Sam. xv., 23.

¹⁰ Deut. xx., 16. ¹¹ Judg. v., 23. ¹² Joshua x., 23-27.

was to lose half the victory. Jael could not slay him openly with the sword. She was a woman, and she took a woman's method. She detained him, and then lest perchance he might up and away before she could deliver him into safe hands, she slew him. Or she may have wished to keep her word and pledge, which evidently were given to the intent that she would not betray him into the hand of another. Sisera had no thought that he needed protection against her arm. If she betrayed him, she lied to him; if she protected him, she must lie to his pursuers. Placed in this dilemma, it was kindness, if Sisera must die, no less than fierceness and righteousness for her to slay him.

Jael's loyalty to Jehovah is her justification, and obtained for her the divine blessing. But her deed must not be judged according to Christian morals, nor regarded absolutely righteous. The blessing does not demand that. Great allowance must be given her. Not being an Israelite, not being of the chosen people, uninstructed doubtless, her ideas of right and wrong could only have been very crude and imperfect. She was a Bedouin, and among the Bedouins "artifice, treachery and assassination were lawful in avenging blood."¹ She lived also in a rough feudal time, "when there was no king in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes." The true religious spirit of that age also was: Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thy enemy.² The Psalmist hated his enemies with perfect hatred.³ And unquestionably in such a spirit he who had forfeited life was held to have forfeited truth. Thou shalt not bear false witness against *thy neighbor*. That it was wrong to deceive an enemy like Sisera, that a lawful avenger of blood should not by any means entice and entrap his foe, never, probably during the days of the Judges, entered the mind of a pious Israelite. The blessing of Jael, viewed from a mere historic standpoint, shows that to Deborah the murder of Sisera was commendable, and Deborah represents the highest piety and morality of the period. How the midwives in Egypt, how Rahab and Ehud lied, and yet God prospered them.⁴ We must not judge them and Jael by the light of our day, God did not, but of their day which was that of dim obscure early dawn. Under their circumstances, may we not believe, if influenced by a true and living faith they could not have done otherwise. The stress then was upon faithful obedience to God, upon a recognition of Jehovah. The idea that faithlessness to a fellow being might

¹ Michaelis, Bk. 3, Art. 4. Eng. Trans. London, 1814. Vol. ii., p. 205. See also *The Land and The Book*, Vol. ii., p. 147.

² Not personal enemies of the chosen people, but political, idolatrous enemies.

³ Ps. cxxxix., 22.

⁴ Exod. i., 15-21. Josh. ii., 4, 5. Judg. iii., 20.

be equally faithlessness to God, or that a wrong against man might be equally a wrong against God, was not then fully realized. The frequent deceptions of the patriarchs show this, and in bold relief is it presented in the story of the old prophet¹. Moreover to teach his people perfect righteousness, perfect justice, God was obliged, or else by a miracle change their human nature, to lead them by allowing imperfect justice and imperfect righteousness. Their hearts, as Christ said² were too hard to admit of other treatment. Sound reason now dictates the same principle. We do not exact of the street Arab, reared in ignorance and vice, the same high Christian feelings, the same delicate distinction between right and wrong that we do of one from a refined and cultured Christian home. Upon the newly converted savage we do not impose the highest laws of Christian conduct. And even in our day how much further have we advanced in morality than the Judges?³ Much of the detective system, against which we hear no protest, even from religious bodies, is carried on by the same means, call it treachery if you will, by which Jael ensnared and slew Sisera. And who will condemn the detective, who thus acting, was the means of bringing the murderous clan of the Molly Maguires to justice? It is true that he did not assassinate as Ehud and Jael did, but Ehud and Jael lived when the private avenger and not the government was the executor. Ehud and Jael lived also when individual life was not so sacred and independent as it is now. That idea in its modern form was unknown to the ancients.⁴ The son belonged to the father, the father to the state. No one had absolute proprietorship to himself, and to have spared, for example, Achan's children might have been to have violated the children of Israel's sense of complete and atoning justice. To give them also a true conception of the iniquity of the Canaanite, of the difference between the service of Jehovah and that of other Gods, it was necessary that they should be commanded to wage war to the knife. They were threatened with similar treatment in case of apostasy. It was terrible surgery, reminding one of the boiling oil once poured into gun-shot wounds, but it was the only surgery available at that time to rid the world of evil and preserve a true faith. Cromwell applied a little of a similar kind; the Indian mutiny made men desire more; and how recently the complete annihilation of the Bashi Bazouks, authors of the Bulgarian massacres, would not have been unwelcome to many Christians. Ancient war-

¹ 1 Kgs. xlii., 11-32.

² Matt. xix., 8.

³ See Paley's *Moral Philosophy*, Book 3, Chap. 15.

⁴ The Mosaic Code, however, more than any other ancient one was conducive to its development. For its later development on the spiritual side, see Ezek. xviii.

fare was accompanied with extermination, and it no more violated the moral sense of the ancient worshipper of Jehovah that innocent women and children should be slaughtered¹ than the making Germans of the people of Alsace and Lorraine does that of the Christian. They were innocent of the Franco-Prussian war; why should they be compelled to lose their nationality?

The safety of Israel, also, demanded the extermination of the Canaanites. Had they been left in the land they would have been their ruin. Indeed it was only as by fire that at last a remnant of Israel was saved from being engulfed and destroyed by the surrounding polytheism. It was necessary also that Israel's hand should do this work. They would only have been nurslings, a poor puny race of men, had Jehovah by famine, or pestilence, or earthquake, swept all their enemies from before them. Self-reliance, self-maintenance, as well as faith in the Almighty, were as essential then as now to the development of an earnest national and individual character. Without a fierce truculent energy how could they have ever held their ground, "wedged in, as they were, among the iron charioted millions of Amalek, Midian, Philistia, Assyria and Egypt?" Did not the Judge of all the earth do right then, when he said "Thou shalt shew no mercy unto them?" Mistaken is the notion that in a theocracy God must set up the laws of heaven. When Jehovah assumed the leadership of his people, it was as a perfect leader from an earthly and not from a heavenly standpoint, a perfect ruler for men and not for angels, for centuries before Christ and not centuries after. The Mosaic code for its purpose was perfect. It was a miracle, and, considered historically and politically, is a perpetual witness of the divine guidance of the Jewish lawgiver. The law was *divine*, but for a *human* race.

The position of Israel also was unique. They were the first and last earthly theocracy. As Sinai, the mount of God, towers with its granite cliffs sublimely stern in the Arabian desert, so Israel, the chosen of God, stands apart and separate from all other nations. They were instruments of divine judgments against the Canaanites, their enemies, because Jehovah's. They were directly under the command of God; and of all nations to them alone was such a command directly given. This is the key to their career. Take the direct divine element out of their history, treat it from a purely rationalistic stand-point, and it is a complete enigma. This divine element vindicates Israel's military ethics. Thus conscious of doing God's will by the sword, they were kept from being defiled by their bloody work, kept from being a mere robber horde like Attila and his hosts, a scourge of God and nothing more.

¹ Comp. Ps. cxxxvii., 9.

There should then be no difficulty in the bloody and deceitful deeds approved in the Old Testament. Critics are at fault when they judge them by the enlightened conscience and feelings of Christianity. Such a conscience, such feelings did not then exist, could not then exist, for the light of revelation had not been sufficient in intensity and duration to produce them. This is hard to realize. It is hard to go back 3000 years, to divest oneself of all that fineness of moral feeling which Christianity has given and to judge fairly from the standpoint of the Pentateuch. Yet even in the Old Testament is seen a progression in ethics. The Book of Job, as it presents the firm assurance of a future life, an intimate relation with God, and a new glimpse of God, and almost a new revelation of God's dealings with men, so also, as though based upon this doctrinal advancement, gives, in its description of the ideal upright man,¹ teachings which are far in advance of those presented in the older books.

A still greater advance was made when Christ fulfilled the law, when he said a new commandment I give unto you ; yet the same *principle* underlies all—whole hearted service and love to God. And this service is none the less real in an age of little light than in the full noon-day blaze. None the less real in the bloody judge of Israel, in the witch-hanging puritan of New England, than in the Christian philanthropist of the nineteenth century. And wherever this service is found, as it was in Jael, the divine benediction rests upon it. But from a divine blessing or sanction one must not conclude that an act may not contain elements of wrong and unrighteousness, any more than that the lives of God's chosen ones, Abraham, Job, David and Peter, for example, were sinless. And however dark may now appear Old Testament teachings contrasted with Christian, can even the present Christian conception of practical morality be regarded as perfect? May not a deed which to-day we are prone to justify and regard worthy of divine approval appear in the fuller and purer light of the hereafter not less stained and spotted than now appear the deeds of Israel's heroes. They tested acts by the law thundered from Sinai. We test them by Christ's sermon on the Mount. The angels, by the light which proceeds from the throne of the Lamb. Each successive test is more refining than the previous, reveals dross unseen by the other. But if beneath the dross there is the pure metal, the righteous intention, is there not also divine approval? And thus was it not written :

“Blessed above women be Jael
The wife of Heber, the Kenite
Above women in the tent blessed.”

¹ Job xxxi. I assume that the Book of Job belongs to the Hochmah literature.