

THE SONG OF DEBORAH: HUMAN HEROISM OR DIVINE SALVATION

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Abstract

The Song of Deborah (Judges 5:2-4) is, according to many scholars, the earliest text in the Bible, although there are different opinions regarding editorial additions that were incorporated in the ancient layer. In this article I would like to distinguish between the original and the editorial additions and demonstrate that as a result of the editorial intervention, the thematic sequence of the poem was damaged, and its sophisticated numerical-symbolic structure went wrong.

The poem reflects a complex relationship between the initial existence of the Israelites in the mountain ranges and the Canaanite cities in the valleys. On the one hand, the poetry draws from the patterns of the Canaanite poetic work. On the other hand, it tells the story of the war between the Israelites and the Canaanites. Theologically, too, the poem shows that the only god of the Israelites is YHWH, a god who is not recognized in the Canaanite culture.

The analysis also makes it possible to reveal a principled debate. The original creators of the poem saw the victory as the result of a joint effort by God and the heroes of Israel who came "to YHWH's help" (Judges 5:23). However, the editors responsible for the current text, sought to downplay the value of the Israelites and their abilities and present the victory as the result of purely divine salvation - "with the help of God".