
Character Biography

Barahir

By Oshun

Barahir is best known as the father of Beren One-hand (of the renowned couple Beren and Lúthien) and as the original recipient from Finrod Felagund of the famed Ring of Barahir. He was born in the 400th year of the First Age of Arda and died 60 years later. Although he eventually became the heir to the House of Bëor, Barahir was the last born of his parents' children, inheriting his lordship from his older brother Bregolas, who preceded him as the third Lord of Ladros. Barahir and Bregolas had three sisters, Bregil, Hirwen, and Gilwen.¹

Barahir married Emeldir, a formidable woman in her own right (more on her below), and she bore him his only child, Beren, later called *Erchamion* after the loss of his hand. She was also of the House of Bëor, but descended through the line of Belen, the second of Bëor's sons, while Barahir traced his lineage to Balan, the first son of Bëor.²

The House of Bëor was to reach extreme importance in the future of Middle-earth. Bregolas was the great-great-grandfather of Eärendil, while Barahir was the great-grandfather of Elwing.

The House of Bëor and the Lords of Ladros

The House of Bëor is referred to as the First House of the Edain because their grouping comprised the first Men who left the area of Hildórien to make their way west into Beleriand.³ The progenitor of the House of Bëor, who was originally named Balan, received the name of Bëor as a vassal to Finrod Felagund and later was called Bëor the Old because of his long life.⁴ The people of the House of Bëor are said to have resembled the Noldor:

The Men of that house were dark or brown of hair, with grey eyes; and of all Men they were most like to the Noldor and most loved by them; for they were eager of mind, cunning-handed, swift in understanding, long in memory, and they were moved sooner to pity than to laughter.⁵

The people of Balan/Bëor were the first Men that Finrod Felagund met and befriended, the ones who learned to love and respect the son of Finarfin: "Felagund dwelt among them and taught them true knowledge, and they loved him, and took him for their lord, and were ever after loyal to the house of Finarfin."⁶ When Finrod after many years desired to return to Nargothrond, Bëor begged to follow him and lived out the rest of his life there.⁷ While Bëor's descendant Boromir was head of their house in 410 First Age, Angrod and Aegnor gave the Bëorians the region of Ladros in Dorthonion.⁸ The people of Bëor remained there, continuing in their loyalty to Finrod Felagund until their dispersal in the violence and destruction wrought in the Battle of Sudden Flame.

The Dagor Bragollach

The Dagor Bragollach (translated from Sindarin as the "Battle of Sudden Flame") was the fourth battle of the Wars of Beleriand in the First Age. Galadriel refers to that series of conflicts called the Wars of Beleriand, along with others, in *The Lord of Rings* when she says, "together through

The Silmarillion Writers' Guild Reference Library

<http://www.silmarillionwritersguild.org/reference/characterofthemonth/barahir.php>

© Oshun

the ages of the world we have fought the long defeat."⁹ One reads the history of the Dagor Bragollach with a sense of growing horror that this is to be a watershed moment not only for the House of Bëor but within the history of Middle-earth.

Up until that point, despite skirmishes, smaller battles, and a need for constant defensive alertness, the restive peace in the northern parts of Beleriand was held by the Noldorin lords and their allies against the forces of Morgoth. During that period, the lords of Noldor expanded their fiefdoms and formed alliances with the Sindarin in the north, as well as with the Men of the Edain moving into Beleriand from "the eastward regions of Middle-earth."¹⁰ The Noldor and those allied with them constructed and maintained defensive fortifications and largely held their borders against the forces of the Dark Lord. But this relative peace would not hold, as Morgoth had planned and prepared a surprise assault during the latter part of that period of relative quiescence. The paragraph describing that sudden devastating attack is among Tolkien's most beautiful, suspense-laden pieces of prose. It is nearly impossible on this writer's part to let pass the opportunity to cite it:

There came a time of winter, when night was dark and without moon; and the wide plain of Ard-galen stretched dim beneath the cold stars, from the hill-forts of the Noldor to the feet of Thangorodrim. The watchfires burned low, and the guards were few; on the plain few were waking in the camps of the horsemen of Hithlum. Then suddenly Morgoth sent forth great rivers of flame that ran down swifter than Balrogs from Thangorodrim, and poured over all the plain; and the Mountains of Iron belched forth fires of many poisonous hues, and the fume of them stank upon the air, and was deadly.¹¹

This sudden offensive after nearly four hundred years of the Siege of Angband completely shattered the world of the enemies of Morgoth. Even with warning, it is likely there could have been no possible preparation which could have alleviated the wreckage wrought by that initial assault. Thus, many were lost—"and the foes of Morgoth were scattered and sundered one from another."¹² But those who survived the initial fire storms and expected attacks continued to fight:

During this 'fourth of the Great Battles, Dagor Bragollach,' for instance, the siege of Angband is ended by Morgoth's sweeping offensive, which scatters the Noldor as those elves who survive flee south or into the hidden land of Doriath. Two of Finarfin's sons, Angrod and Aegnor, fall in battle; Finrod himself is surrounded and saved only by the heroics of Barahir and his men, but all 'cut their way out of battle with great loss' (*Silm* 181-82).¹³

The lords of House of Finarfin and their dependent peoples bore the brunt of Morgoth's fiery assault upon the Elves and Men to his immediate south—King Finrod Felagund's younger brothers Angrod and Aegnor both died in the initial attack. Bregolas, lord of the House of Bëor, and a large part of his warriors were killed. Barahir, the brother of Bregolas, survived to take leadership of the House of Bëor. He returned to Dorthonion; however, most of his people fled from their homes and took refuge in the fastness of Hithlum.¹⁴

Barahir managed to hold Dorthonion against Morgoth's relentless pressure until only twelve of his men remained. The last dozen included his son Beren, two nephews, and nine servants. Those stalwart survivors were hunted like beasts, hiding upon the moors.

His wife Emeldir, a fighter herself, would remain with these few warriors, but the Bëorian women and children forced to abandon their homes and flee were in desperate need of a leader. Emeldir took up that role, and after great hardship and loss, she led them into the relative safety of Brethil. Because of her courage and leadership, she became known as Emeldir the Man-hearted.¹⁵

When he heard that Finrod Felagund was trapped in a skirmish near the Fen of Serech, Barahir rushed with a small group of his bravest and best warriors to his rescue. Forming a wall of spears around Finrod, they cut their way out of the battle at great loss.¹⁶

Reduced thereafter to waging what we might call guerilla warfare today, Barahir and his small group continued to contest the domination of Dorthonion. Finally in 460 of the First Age, their location was betrayed to Sauron, and while Beren was away on an errand, the hideout of the surviving comrades was discovered and they were attacked and eliminated. When Barahir was killed, an Orc captain severed his hand upon which he wore the ring. Aware of its value, both practical and emotional, to his family, Beren hunted down the Orc, killing him and retrieving the ring.¹⁷

The Ring of Barahir

Barahir came thither with the doughtiest of his men, and broke the leaguer of the Orcs and saved the Elven-king. Then Inglor [later changed to Finrod] gave to Barahir his ring, an heirloom of his house, in token of the oath that he swore unto Barahir to render whatsoever service was asked in hour of need to him or to any of his kin. Then Inglor went south to Nargothrond, but Barahir returned to Dorthonion to save what he could of the people of Bëor.¹⁸

Now Finrod Felagund had been well aware and grateful that, without the intervention of Barahir and his warriors, he would never have survived. He gave Barahir a ring which was fated to cost the Elven king his life, but also to play a huge part in the future of Middle-earth and the final destruction of the last successors of Morgoth remaining in Middle-earth. The ring acted as a token of Finrod's vow of aid to any of Barahir's kin who carried it and was brought originally from Valinor.¹⁹

When Beren fell in love with Lúthien and sought to make her his wife, Thingol demanded the bride price of a Silmaril from Morgoth's crown, a seemingly impossible task to fulfill. But Beren swore to secure it. In his performance of this seemingly semi-suicidal venture, Beren travels to Nargothrond and presents the ring to Finrod. The Lord of Nargothrond does not hesitate to fulfill the promise he had made to Barahir and follows Beren to his doom. When Lúthien shows up to rescue Beren, arriving just a little too late to save Finrod's life, she finds the Elven king slaughtered by a werewolf and Beren, the sole survivor of their party, weeping over his body: "Thus King Finrod Felagund, fairest and most beloved of the house of Finwë, redeemed his oath; but Beren mourned beside him in despair."²⁰

Beren again retrieves the ring. Over the years it passes from Dior to Elwing and finally to Elros, who carries it to Númenor with him. The *Unfinished Tales* account of the ring states that,

Only the Ring of Barahir father of Beren One-hand survived the Downfall; for it was given by Tar-Elendil to his daughter Silmarien and was preserved in the House of the

Lords of Andúnië, of whom the last was Elendil the Faithful who fled from the wrack of Númenor to Middle-earth.²¹

Most readers first encounter the Ring of Barahir not in *The Silmarillion*, but in *The Lord of the Rings*, when Elrond passes it to Aragorn as an heirloom of his house and sign of his worthiness to pursue the reunification of the kingdoms of Arnor and Gondor, and hence the liberation of Middle-earth from the hold to Morgoth's last lieutenant Sauron. (For an interim link in the provenance and chain of ownership for the Ring of Barahir on its way to Elrond, see my [Character Biography of Arvedui](#) .) Aragorn then gave the ring to Arwen when they pledged their troth on the Midsummer's Night of 2980 of the Third Age on the hill of Cerin Amroth in Lothlórien.²² Chronologically within the histories, this is the latest report in the texts that we have of the Ring of Barahir. Its trail stops with Arwen.

Conclusion

To return again to the sense of loss and all-around tough times within which the history of Barahir's life is set and his legacy formed, William A. Senior wrote most pertinently in his essay "Loss Eternal in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth" that "[t]he issue of loss, along with that of wonder, may in fact be deemed central to modern fantasy."²³ In *The Silmarillion*, according to Senior's essay,

Tolkien uncompromisingly narrates the course of hundreds of years of war against Morgoth that laid waste parts of the world and destroyed the princes and peoples of the Noldor. We witness the destruction of Beleriand, Gondolin, Nargothrond, and Doriath; the violent and often horrible deaths of Finwë, Fingolfin, Finarfin, Fëanor and all his sons, Finrod, Fingon, Beleg, Glorfindel, Turgon, and Elenwë, to mention but a few; the destruction of Barahir, Hador, Beren, Tuor, Húrin, Galdor, Huor, and countless others among men, elves, and dwarves.²⁴

This sense of devastating loss, which also echoes the dark fatalism of the Norse epics of which Tolkien was so fond, is certainly central to *The Silmarillion* and most particularly evident in its Chapter 18, "Of the Ruin of Beleriand and the Fall of Fingolfin."²⁵ We move from a world wherein the shaky balance between the forces of light and darkness is directly threatened and, to steal the words from the poet W. B. Yeats, "[t]hings fall apart; the centre cannot hold; [m]ere anarchy is loosed upon the world, [t]he blood-dimmed tide is loosed. . . ."²⁶ And yet within that smoke-blackened and terrifying world, where the center no longer holds, there remain unwavering heroes like Barahir, with his determination and his hard-won family heirloom, who project hope down through the Ages and into the eucatastrophe²⁷ of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Works Cited

1. *The War of the Jewels, The Later Quenta Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of Men into the West."
2. Ibid.
3. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Men."
4. *The Silmarillion*, "Index of Names."
5. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of Men into the West."
6. Ibid.

-
7. Ibid.
 8. Ibid.
 9. *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, "The Mirror of Galadriel."
 10. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Men."
 11. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Ruin of Beleriand and the Fall of Fingolfin."
 12. Ibid.
 13. W.A. Senior, "Loss Eternal in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth" in *J.R.R. Tolkien and His Literary Resonances: Views of Middle-Earth*, ed. George Clark and Daniel Timmons (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 177.
 14. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Ruin of Beleriand and the Fall of Fingolfin."
 15. Ibid.
 16. Ibid.
 17. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Beren and Lúthien."
 18. *The War of the Jewels, The Grey Annals*, §146.
 19. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Ruin of Beleriand and the Fall of Fingolfin."
 20. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Beren and Lúthien."
 21. *Unfinished Tales*, "A Description of the Island of Númenor," Note 2.
 22. *The Lord of the Rings*, "Appendix A: Annals of the Kings and Rulers, The Númenórean Kings, The Tale of Aragorn and Arwen."
 23. W.A. Senior, W. A., "Loss Eternal," 176.
 24. Ibid.
 25. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Ruin of Beleriand and the Fall of Fingolfin."
 26. W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," in *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan Collector's Library, 2010), Kindle edition.
 27. Tolkien invented this word which he defines most briefly as "the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears (which I argued it is the highest function of fairy-stories to produce)." *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, Letter 89.

About the Author

Oshun's *Silmarillion*-based stories may be found on the [SWG archive](#).