

THE FIRST ARMAGEDDON BATTLE

– *JANUARY 10.* – *JUDGES 4:4-24; 5:1-22.* –

SISERA AND BARAK – MRS. DEBORAH AND MRS. Jael – WAS THE LATTER A MURDERESS? – HOW "THE STARS IN THEIR COURSES FOUGHT AGAINST SISERA."

"The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of their troubles." – Psalm 34:17.

WE HAVE heretofore pointed out that the great Battle of Armageddon – the anti-typical one – is near – that it will quickly follow the present world-war. Today's Study relates to the first of the great battles in the Valley of Megiddo, noted for its many slaughters, and therefore made the basis of the Divine prediction respecting the "Time of Trouble such as was not since there was a nation," which will precede and prepare the way for Messiah's glorious Rule of a thousand years. – 1 Cor. 15:24-26; Rev. 20:6.

The Israelites, guilty of idolatry, had, according to God's covenant with them, been chastened by the permitting of their enemies to vanquish them. They had come to great straits. Their enemies had become strong and high-handed. General Sisera, of the Canaanites, having humbled the Israelites of North Palestine for years, started with a large army, intent upon victories, to the southward. The strength of his army is shown in the statement that it contained nine hundred iron chariots.

By the time he had gotten as far southward as the Valley of Megiddo, messengers reached him, informing him that Barak, a leader among the Israelites, had improved the opportunity of his absence and was also leading southward an army of ten thousand Israelites. Under Divine guidance Barak made Mt. Tabor his army base – the same which, in Jesus' day, became known to His

followers as the Mount of Transfiguration, where the coming Kingdom of Messiah was represented in a vision. Thus we have another remarkable feature of the picture of the future – the association of the vision of the Kingdom in proximity with the Armageddon field of disaster picturing the overthrow of present institutions.

A DISCOMFITED ARMY

General Sisera, disdainful of the poorly armed Israelites, advanced with his army on both sides of the River Kishon toward Mt. Tabor. Then it was that the word of the Lord came afresh to General Barak, directing him to advance against the army of the Canaanites. The slaughter was a great one, as related in our lesson. Sisera's army was discomfited, so that it scattered. A great storm and cloudburst swelled the river, making quagmires of the lower valleys, rendering useless the chariots of Sisera. [R5604 : page 8] His soldiers, fleeing for their lives, were cut down by the Israelites, while other thousands were swept by the freshets down the river to the sea. This interference of God on behalf of His people Israel in figurative language is styled the fighting of the "stars of heaven" against Sisera's army. Similarly in the great Armageddon near at hand it will not be human might that will prevail, but the disconcerted hosts will effect the complete disruption of the present order of things, for "every man's hand shall be against his brother and against his neighbor." (Ezekiel 38:21; Zechariah 8:10; 14:13.) It is the cloudburst of Truth and the rising waters of knowledge which are bringing to pass this great human catastrophe – which the Lord will overrule for the blessing of the world.

THE POWER OF A FAITHFUL WOMAN

Although the Lord has been pleased usually to use men in connection with His work, not only as typical characters, but also as evangelists of the Gospel, nevertheless the Scriptures give us

pictures of noble women who, because of the delinquency of men, have been used and almost forced into public service by God's providence. Notable amongst the instances of such in the Bible is the case of Mrs. Deborah. She perceived how neglect of the Divine Law had borne fruit in the subjugation of her people. She perceived that this was spreading throughout the land of Canaan, and that what was needed was a guide to point the people to the right way – back to God. The Canaanites, whom they had not conquered, had conquered them.

The conquest was permitted of God. It had its incipient state when the Israelites neglected the Divine direction that they should live separate from all other people. Instead, they had begun to intermarry with the Canaanites. These, in turn, had enticed their husbands and their children to the heathen gods of worship. Apparently many of Israel who had not gone over to idolatry had nearly lost their knowledge and appreciation of the true God.

The same is a difficulty today in this land – everywhere. The revulsion of Christian people from the monstrous creedal errors of the past has alienated many from the Bible, under the belief that the Bible and the creeds teach the same doctrines. This is the explanation of empty pews and a distaste for religion. What the people need is correct information respecting the true God of Love and **[R5605 : page 8]** His real Plan, as outlined in the Bible.

In the dark hour of Israel's oppression, the princes of the tribes seemed to lack patriotism as well as faith in God. Each tribe was a separate State and there was no cohesion between them – the Divinely intended bond of union, the true religion, having relaxed. It was about this time that the Lord, seeking a channel through which to be gracious to His people, found that channel in a woman – Deborah. She realized the situation more keenly than others, probably because more deeply consecrated to God and His service. She removed from her home in the northern part to a central place

in the Highlands of Ephraim. From there she sent encouraging, stimulating messages to the chief men of the various tribes. She was respected. Her counsel was appreciated. Her advice was sought. In this sense she judged – admonished, guided, assisted – Israel.

FULL DEVOTION OF HEART ESSENTIAL

Deborah is styled a prophetess. This might mean a public teacher, or it might mean one through whom the Lord sent special messages. Some things connected with the story indicate the latter. Surely the Lord used her, and that because she was a willing and consecrated servant of His Cause, His people. What a lesson here for all of God's people – that in order to be used in the Lord's service and accomplish things for Him and His, full devotion of heart is essential!

At an opportune time, when Sisera's army with nine hundred chariots had proceeded southward to Megiddo, Deborah sent word to Barak, a leader in her tribe – Naphtali. She admonished that now was the time to do something for the deliverance of God's people, and that he should immediately march to battle with ten thousand Israelites. Barak refused unless she would co-operate. She agreed to do so, forewarning him, however, that the honor of the matter would thus be divided with herself, and that he would miss a part of his blessing by reason of his lack of courage. Thus it was that when Barak's army moved to Mt. Tabor, it was under General Barak's command, but a woman was the real mouthpiece or agent of God, in directing the affairs of the battle which brought such signal victory to Israel.

WAS THE WAR JUSTIFIED? – MRS. Jael

General Sisera's chariots stuck in the mire; his army defeated, he fled afoot with others, only to be overtaken by the victors. Entering a supposedly hospitable tent, he hid himself and fell

asleep. His hostess improved the opportunity and drove a tent-pin through his temple. The act has been denounced as a breach of hospitality by some, but by others it has been defended on the grounds that the custom still of the Arabs of Palestine is that any man intruding into a woman's tent is worthy of death. Anyway, let us remember that Jael was not a Christian woman, not begotten of the Holy Spirit, not taught in the School of Christ and that, therefore, whatever may be said of her would have no bearing whatever in respect to Christians who are under the Law of the Spirit of Christ – the Law of Love.

Incidentally, let us remember that none of the Jews stood in the same relationship to God and His Divine purposes that true Christians occupy. Their warfare in the flesh typifies our warfare as New Creatures against the weaknesses and appetites of our flesh. Let us remember also that the death of Sisera and his army did not precipitate them into a hell of eternal tortures, but merely was the passage-way by which they were "gathered to their fathers" – "slept with their fathers." They have known nothing since, and will know nothing in the future until the time of their awakening; and that awakening God has graciously timed so that it will be after Messiah shall have taken possession of the world, and by the establishment of His Kingdom shall have overthrown the kingdom of Satan and the reign of Sin and Death.

Sisera and his army will come forth, like the remainder of mankind, as a result of the redemptive work of Jesus, finished at Calvary. They will come forth in order that the grace of God may be testified to them, and that they may have an opportunity, by obedience to the laws of the Kingdom, to prepare themselves to enter into everlasting life on the plane of human perfection in an earthly Paradise. With this though before us, it makes little matter whether death comes upon us through war pestilence or disease. Only those who have heard of Christ, who have accepted Him and who have been begotten of the Holy Spirit as New Creatures – only

these are on trial at the present time. The trial of all the remainder of the world is future; for knowledge is an essential feature of testing for life eternal or death eternal.

"A thousand years! earth's coming glory!
'Tis the glad Day so long foretold;
'Tis the bright morn of Zion's glory,
Prophets foresaw in times of old."

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