

October 3, 2021

## “Curse Ye Meroz”

*“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”* (Judges 5:23).

This verse, in context, constitutes but a small portion of Deborah’s song of praise to God following the defeat of Jabin king of Canaan, who for *“twenty years...had harshly oppressed the children of Israel”* (cf. Judges 4:3). With regards to Bible chronology, this was during the time of the Judges — a time period which takes us from the death of Joshua (Judges 1:1) to the anointing of Saul (I Sam. 10), and which encompassed the period of Judges, Ruth, and I Samuel 1-10.

This was a very critical time in Israelite history. Whereas the book of Joshua is a book of conquest and success, Judges has been called “the book of failure.” But it was failure caused by Israel’s repeated apostasies, and of their subsequently being oppressed by enemies within the land. God Who *“rules in the kingdom of men”* (Dan. 4:25), refused to turn a blind eye to Israel’s continued unfaithfulness. Hence, when Israel forsook the God of heaven and turned to the gods of human imagination and invention, God’s anger waxed *“hot against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies round about...”* (Judges 2:14). Ultimately, when the oppression would become so severe that they could bear it no longer, Israel would become momentarily penitent and cry out to God for deliverance. God would hear their cry for help and send Judges who delivered them from the hands of their enemies. With regards to the context of our opening text (Judges 5:23), this brings us to the fourth chapter of Judges.

As we begin reading Judges 4, we discover that Israel *“again did evil in the sight of the Lord”* (v. 1), so the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan (v. 2), who for twenty years *“mightily oppressed the children of Israel”* (v. 3). At this point we are introduced to Deborah, *“a prophetess”* who *“judged Israel at that time”* (v. 4). Deborah commissioned Barak to take the lead and go fight against the army of Jabin whose captain was Sisera (v. 6-8). As it turned out, *“the Lord discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword”* (v. 15). Sisera, the captain, fled and went *“to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite”* (v. 17). Jael pretended to be the friend and protector of Sisera. She received him into her tent, gave him a bottle of milk to drink, and covered him when he laid down for needed rest. The tired Sisera quickly fell asleep. Jael then took a tent peg and a hammer and *“drove the peg into his temple”* (Judges 4:21), thereby killing Sisera. So God *“subdued...Jabin the king of Canaan..., and the hand of the children of Israel prospered and prevailed”* (Judges 4:23,24). This brings us to the fifth chapter of Judges.

Judges 5 is a chapter which records the song of Deborah and Barak, who sang “*praise to the Lord God of Israel*” (v. 3) for having delivered Israel from her enemies. In this song God was praised for His “*righteous acts*” toward His people (v. 11). Others, such as the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, were commended for having “*jeopardized their lives to the point of death*” (v. 18) in this successful encounter against Jabin and their Canaanite enemies. And this brings us to our opening text, Judges 5:23, which mentions the “*curse*” upon Meroz and “*its inhabitants.*”

Meroz is defined as having been a “place in Northern Palestine near the Kishon River, in or near the Valley of Jezreel” (**Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary**). This is the only mention of Meroz in the Bible. Concerning Meroz, we note this statement from **The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**: “It is a strange fate, shared with Chorazin, to be preserved from oblivion only by the record of a curse.” Yes, that is correct — the only thing which preserved Meroz from oblivion was the curse pronounced upon it by an “*angel of the Lord!*”

### **But Why the “Curse?”**

Meroz was not cursed for its idolatry. Meroz was not cursed for immorality. Meroz was not cursed for having taken up arms against Israel. Meroz was not cursed for openly aiding and abetting the enemies of God’s people. In fact, Meroz was not cursed for having done a thing that was inherently evil. In brief, Meroz was cursed for having done **nothing!**

Let us now re-read Judges 5:23: “*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.*”

It is interesting that the “*curse*” pronounced upon Meroz comes between the commendation of Zebulun and Naphtali who “*jeopardized their lives to the point of death*” (v. 18) in defense of the cause of the Lord, and the blessing pronounced upon Jael who killed Sisera by driving a tent peg through his temple (v. 24-27). Zebulun, Naphtali, and Jael stood on the side of the Lord and His people. They were praised. Meroz did nothing. Meroz was cursed — and that by an “*angel of the Lord!*” While others “*jeopardized their lives,*” Meroz hung back in sullen indifference. While others manifested zeal for the Lord and His afflicted people, Meroz and its inhabitants showed no sympathy or concern. Yes, it is fitting that Meroz’s only epitaph was worded by an angel of the Lord, and is reduced to the words, “*curse ye Meroz!*”

### **The Application:**

“*Curse ye Meroz*” was not recorded in the Bible for the benefit of its inhabitants. The textual recording of this “*curse*” occurred long after the inhabitants of Meroz were dead. But this incident is recorded in that part of the Bible (the Old Testament) which was written “*for our learning*” (Rom. 15:4), or for our benefit. In brief, the Lord expects

His people in this the Gospel age to take note of the “*curse*” pronounced upon Meroz, and then make the proper application.

The parallels between then and now are significant. Israel was dwelling in the midst of an ungodly society, and had the responsibility to be a “*kingdom of priests, and a holy nation*” (Ex. 19:5). Spiritual Israel today (Gal. 3:29; Gal. 6:16) dwells in the midst of “*a crooked and perverse*” society, and is obligated to “*shine as lights in the world*” (Phil. 2:15). National Israel was called into war against her enemies. Spiritual Israel is commissioned to “*fight the good fight of faith*” (I Tim. 6:12). National Israel was floundering in one apostasy after another. Spiritual Israel has been periodically characterized by apostasy, even from the first century, and that aspect of our existence as a people yet prevails in the 21st century. The leaders of national Israel rallied to the cause of the Lord and His people. And, thankfully, there are yet many in spiritual Israel who are rallying to the cause of truth, and have not bowed their knees to the Baals of immorality, Hedonism, Situationalism, Denominationalism, Marital Infidelity, or to the perversity of “*unity in diversity*” attempts to accommodate both error and false teachers. And, yes, there are many others who may regard themselves as “*lesser lights*” in spiritual Israel, but they are digging in, taking the heat, making the needed sacrifices and, like Zebulun and Naphtali, are willing to jeopardize “*their lives to the point of death.*” Thank God for such people! May their tribe increase!

But Meroz is still around! “*Meroz*” in the bodies of brothers and sisters in Christ who sit on the sidelines in spineless indifference, while others take the heat and bear the brunt of spiritual warfare. “*Meroz*” in the form of professed Christians who refuse to “*come to the help of the Lord*” and who offer nothing but criticism for those who put their lives, their reputations, and their futures on the line for the cause which they so dearly love “*Meroz*” in the form of would-be saints who fare sumptuously every day, but offer no help or encouragement toward the conversion of countless millions of spiritually impoverished souls who, in their present condition, are headed for a devil’s hell! “*Meroz*” in the form of members of local churches who are “*at ease in Zion*” and lift not one finger to aid the home congregation in its work of Evangelism, Edification, and Benevolence to indigent saints.

#### **Conclusion:**

The Old Testament “*curse*” of Meroz is parallel to the fate Jesus described in Matthew 25:41-46, wherein He pronounced the ultimate destiny of those whose besetting sin was the sin of **omission**. If we are true Christians, then we are in the Lord’s army, and we are called upon to “*endure hardness*” as good soldiers of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:3). In the Lord’s army there is no reward for traitors, deserters, or for those who merely sit on the sidelines. Let each child of God take due heed, lest he (or she) become a modern **Meroz**!

—B. Witherington

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