

Joshua

And
The Land of Promise

by

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CHAPTER ONE

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

“What if Earth

Be but the shadow of Heaven, and things therein
Each to other like, more than on earth is thought!”

- Milton

THE order of the books of the Old Testament is due to something more than human selection, or even the period of their composition. The same Spirit that inspired them has manifestly controlled their position in the sacred Book. Genesis begins with God, and leads us back to the origin of that divine grace which strives against human sin; loves man before ever there is aught in man to warrant it; and binds itself by a covenant, “**ordered in all things and sure.**” Exodus tells the story of redemption; Leviticus, of worship; Numbers, of our position in the ordered ranks of God’s army; Deuteronomy, of that more spiritual conception of the law of God which is produced by love and faith; and the Book of Joshua is an indispensable link in this chain of symbolical teaching.

Finally, the history of the soul may be traced through the disorder of Judges to the royalty of the Kings; and onward to the hallelujahs of the Psalms, and the prophetic visions of the following books.

There is, then, a special inner meaning in the Book of Joshua, which cannot be exhausted when we have learned from it the story of the extermination of the Canaanites; of the partition and settlement of Canaan; and of the noble simplicity and military exploits of Joshua.

It is impossible to suppose that so much space should have been given to the record of these, unless there had been some deep and holy purpose similar to that which has given such minute directions for Levitical sacrifice, each of which contained some deep spiritual truth required for the growth of holy souls throughout the ages.

Of the Book of Joshua, as of the Paschal Lamb and the Passage of the Red Sea, it may be said, “**All these things happened unto them for ensamples.**”

The clue to this inner meaning is given by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the third and fourth chapters of which are all-important in determining the drift of our interpretation; and it is to the clearer appreciation of the true meaning of these chapters that we must attribute the increasing interest with which the church of God turns to this record of the simple-minded, transparent, humble, and strong soldier, the Miles Standish of the Exodus. If the river Jordan stands for physical death, and Canaan for Heaven, there seems to be no satisfactory interpretation for many items which are narrated with significant minuteness, ere we come to the conquest and partition of the land; and on this line of interpretation there would be some anomaly in associating fighting with the calm restfulness of the New Jerusalem.

A careful study of the chapters referred to shows us that though Canaan was not the rest of God because he spoke of rest through an unknown temple singer, four hundred years after Canaan was occupied yet it was a vivid type of that blessed Sabbath-keeping into which we may enter here and now. We are to earnestly heed lest we “**should let them slip**” of the rest, even as they whose carcasses fell in the wilderness came short of the Land of Promise. “**We which have believed do enter into rest.**”

Our Lord Jesus has entered into his rest, as God did into his; and has therefore received the ideal Land of Canaan, as the representative of his followers to whom he allots it as they believe. We are summoned to give diligence to enter into that rest, that no “**man fall after the same example of disobedience.**”

All these references go to establish the spiritual significance of this wonderful story, which tells of that satisfaction of rest, wealth, and victory which may be enjoyed by those who have come to know the secret things which God hath prepared for them which love him, and which are revealed by his Spirit. Oh that that Spirit may use these chapters for the purpose of leading many of God's redeemed ones from the wilderness life into that rest! For that we have been redeemed; for that we have passed through the Red Sea; to convince us of our need of that we have been permitted to hunger and thirst in the desert waste; and our possession of that will alone convince the world that the Lord Jesus is the Christ of God. We were indeed brought out that we might be brought in; redeemed that we might be a purchased possession; justified that we might be sanctified and glorified.

There is another book in the New Testament in deep spiritual accord with the story told in the Book of Joshua, viz., the Epistle to the Ephesians; which rises above all its kin as the soaring cathedral tower rises above the maze of architecture beneath on which it rests indeed, but which it crowns, and carries within its heart bells that ring out the wedding peal. Already in that epistle we can detect notes which are to announce the consummation of creation in the marriage of the Lamb. The Book of Joshua is to the Old Testament what the Epistle to the Ephesians is to the New. The characteristic word of the Ephesians is “**in heavenly places**” (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). Of course it does not stand for Heaven; but for that spiritual experience of oneness with the risen Saviour in his resurrection and exaltation which is the privilege of all the saints, to which, indeed, they have been called, and which is theirs in him. It may help us to a better comprehension of this analogy between the “**heavenly places**” and the land of Canaan, if we trace it in the following five particulars:

I. EACH WAS THE DESTINED GOAL TO WHICH GOD'S PURPOSE LED HIS PEOPLE

When in answer to the agony of his people's cry, and in remembrance of his covenant, the Lord appeared to Moses at the burning bush, in the first sentence he spoke he pledged himself, not only to deliver his people out of the land of the Egyptians, but to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. Their emancipation from the thrall of Pharaoh was only preparatory to their settlement in the Land of Promise.

Some vision of this seems to have shone like a star before the march of the ransomed hosts; and on the shores of the Red Sea their triumphant strains passed from the destruction of their foes to the mountain of God's inheritance, whither he would bring them in and plant them.

**“The place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in.
The sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established.”**

The plagues of Egypt that struck the fetters from the wrists of an enslaved nation, the institution of the Passover and shedding of blood, the passage of the Red Sea and destruction of the hosts of Egypt all must have been abortive had they not led on to, and been consummated in, the settlement of Israel in Canaan.

Nor otherwise could the divine promise to Abraham have been fulfilled **“Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever.”**

Similarly, though so many of the Lord's redeemed ones seem ignorant of it, all the wonderful facts that lie behind the history of the Church were intended to clear the ground, to level the hills, and fill up the vales, so as to prepare for the glad entrance of all who believe into the blessed life into an experience like that which was enjoyed by the Master himself during his earthly ministry, joy that must forever be a song without words, peace that passeth understanding, love that passeth knowledge. It is remarkable how constantly the Epistles point to this experience.

The foundations of justification are massively and deeply laid, that they may carry the edifice of sanctification and blessedness. The apostles do not write their glowing paragraphs for the conversion of the world, or the awakening of the dead; but for the perfecting of the saints, and the unfolding of the true conditions of holiness, and victory, and power. Let me here solemnly ask:

- Have you realized those conditions, and entered on those privileges?
- Are you still in the wilderness, or have you entered the Land of Promise?
- Do you occupy cities you never built; eat of vineyards and olive-yards you never planted; drink of cisterns filled from the everlasting hills which you have never hewed; and inhabit houses full of all good things which you never stored?
- Do you dwell in a land of corn and wine, while the heavens drop dew?
- Do you, as the beloved of the Lord, dwell between his shoulders?
- Do you tread down your enemies beneath shoes of iron or brass?

- Do you make your dwelling-place in the eternal God, whilst underneath are his everlasting arms?

Test yourself by the promises made to Israel, which are types and shadows of eternal realities; and if they do not foreshadow facts in your spiritual experience, understand that you frustrate the purpose of God in your redemption. Leave those things which are behind to reach forth to the goodly land beyond the Jordan, apprehending that for which you were apprehended of Christ Jesus.

II. EACH WAS IMPOSSIBLE BY THE MEANS OF LAW

“Now after the death of Moses the servant of The Lord, it came to pass, that the Lord spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan.”

“The law was given by Moses,” and in a very real sense found in him its representative. So it was befitting that, when he died, his eye should not be dim, nor his natural force abated. The law of God can never become decrepit, or show signs of weakness and decay. At the end of uncounted ages it is as strong, and fresh, and vigorous as that divine nature of which it is the expression. But the law of God can never bring the soul of man into the Land of Promise; not because of any defect in it, but because of human infirmity and sin.

In that marvelous piece of self-analysis given us in the Epistle to the Romans the Apostle repeatedly affirms that the law is holy, and righteous, and good; he insists that he delighted in it after the inward man, but he tells us that he finds another law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity.

It is the presence of this evil law in our members which makes obedience to the law of God impossible, filling us with disappointment and unrest, ceaseless striving and perpetual failure. We must, therefore, leave the law as an outward rule of life behind us, in that lonely valley over against Beth-peor, that the divine Joshua may lead us into the Land of Promise.

Not by vows, or resolutions, or covenants of consecration signed by blood fresh drawn from the veins; not by external rites or by ascetic abstinence from good and healthy things; not by days of fasting and nights of prayer; not even by obedience to the voice of conscience or the inner light though attention to these is of prime importance by none of these shall we enter the land of blessedness. They all become forms of legalism, when practiced with a view of obtaining the full rest and victory of Christian experience.

Valuable many of them unquestionably are, when the river is crossed, and the land is entered; but they will not of themselves unlock its gates, or roll back its guardian river. Just as the forgiveness of sins and eternal life are the free gift of God’s grace, to be received by faith though their full enjoyment is determined by obedience and self-denial so the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ is bestowed on those only who, in the absence of all merit and effort, receive it with open and empty hands. We do not work up to our rest-day, as the Jews did, but down from it.

III. EACH WAS INTRUSTED TO A REPRESENTATIVE

It is a remarkable characteristic of the story of Joshua that God repeatedly addresses him for the people, and bestows on him what was destined for them.

“Go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people . . . There shall not any man be able to stand before thee.” “See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof.”

And it was for him to apportion it. **“Thou shalt cause this people to inherit the land which I swear unto their fathers to give them.”**

All was put into the hands of Joshua, as the trustee of Israel, for him to administer as each of the tribes came near to appropriate it from his hands.

And in perfect keeping with this, we find it stated, at the close of the seven years war, that **“Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes”** (Joshua 11:23).

How perfectly is this type fulfilled in our blessed Lord! To him as the trustee and representative of his people has all spiritual blessing been given, and he holds it for us to claim. All power is given to him in Heaven and on earth, that He might give us authority over all the power of the enemy. The Father has given Him to have life in Himself, that he might give us life more abundantly. He is full of grace and truth, that out of his fullness we all may receive. He received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, that he might pour him forth in Pentecostal fullness. He hath received of the Father honor and glory, that we might be with him where he is.

Let us diligently comprehend all the fullness of our inheritance in Jesus; and then let us go forward to apprehend it by faith. Whatever he has is in trust for us. Let us claim it! Let us receive the abundance of his grace, that we may reign in this life through the one Man! Let us believe that we receive, and reckon on it, living in the power of what we may not feel, but know we have, so acting faith.

IV. EACH WAS MISSED BY MANY

Their carcasses fell in the wilderness, so that the generation who cried, **“Would God that we had died in the wilderness!”** did in fact die there. The Ninetieth Psalm tells the tale of those sad and dreary years, when an unceasing train of funerals passed out from the camp of Israel, and the mounds of the desert traced the course of the guilty and unbelieving race.

Such scenes are witnessed still. And the state of his Church must be a bitter sorrow to the heart of her Lord. Notwithstanding his agony and bloody sweat, his cross and passion; in spite of the earnest remonstrance of his Word and Spirit; though the fair land of Canaan lies within view yet so few comparatively appear to have realized what he intended.

All around, souls, redeemed by his blood, who have been numbered among his people, are perishing outside the land of blessedness in graves of worldliness, of self-indulgence, and masterful sin. We descry here and there a Joshua, a Caleb, or a tribe of Levites. But the majority seem to have come short. See to it, reader, that you are not one of them! **“Let us give the more earnest heed.”**

V. EACH WAS INFESTED BY MANY ADVERSARIES

The seven nations of Canaan held the land with strongholds and chariots of iron; though the Lord caused them to be to his people as bread which needs only to be eaten. They came against the invading hosts in all the pride of their vast battalions and the array of their warlike preparations; but at his rebuke they fled, at the voice of his thunder they hasted away.

The **“heavenly places”** also are not removed from the noise of conflict, or free from the presence of the foe. Those who are raised to sit there in Christ have to encounter the spiritual hosts of wickedness, principalities and powers of evil. They are conquered foes; but, nevertheless, are terrible to behold, and certain to overcome, unless we are abiding in our great Joshua, who has already vanquished them, and have taken to ourselves the whole armor of God.

Thus the land of Canaan and the heavenly places are one: and we may read into these ancient records the deepest thoughts of the New Testament, for God repeats himself in many ways.

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