

Joshua

And
The Land of Promise

by

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE CONCLUSION OF THE TASK

(Joshua 18)

“All which is real now remaineth,
And faileth never;
The hand which upholds it now, sustaineth
The soul forever.”

- Whittier

THE two great tribes were thus at last settled Judah, as Dean Stanley suggests, like a lion to guard the south, and couch in the fastness of Zion; whilst Ephraim, like the more peaceful but not less powerful bullock, was to rove the rich vales of central Palestine, and defend the frontier of the north. And Joshua was able to turn his attention to the several items which claim a passing notice.

I. JOSHUA ERECTED THE TABERNACLE IN SHILOH

During the march through the wilderness, when the camp was pitched, the Tabernacle occupied the center; around it were grouped the tents of the priests and Levites, whilst the tribes occupied specified places, three to each quarter of the compass. An attentive comparison of those positions with the territories allocated to them in the Land of Promise will reveal a striking similarity. It was as though the encampment were, in its main features, repeated in their final settlement in the land. And to complete the parallel, the Tabernacle was now removed from Gilgal and pitched in Shiloh, which lay as nearly as possible at the heart of Canaan.

No striking landmarks distinguish this ancient site. And, unlike most of the holy places of the world, it is said to be almost entirely featureless. Imagine a somewhat wide plain, surrounded by low hills, with a rocky platform toward its northern end. This was the chosen site of the Tabernacle, after its long wanderings, erected probably on that slight plateau. And so was fulfilled the command of the great lawgiver: **“It shall come to pass that the place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there, thither shall ye bring all that I command you.”**

Here, then, in the center of the land, embosomed in the keeping of the strongest tribes, on the east side of the highway that led from Bethel to Shechem, was the chosen spot where the Tabernacle of God was among men; and he dwelt with them.

Oh that they had acted as his people! then would he have wiped away every tear from their eyes; they would have overcome, and have inherited all things.

The sacred name, “**Shiloh**”, which means *peace* or *rest*, was also given by the dying patriarch to the Messiah. Jesus is the center of his people. Around him they gather. Not his professing Church, not a synod or a convocation, not a creed or a ritual; but the Rest-giver himself is the center around whom the people gather. He is both head and heart, which make the body one. Life in “**the heavenly places**” must have its center in the risen Saviour; and just in proportion as we focus in him shall we find ourselves brought into loving fellowship with all who love him.

The altar of Ed, which was afterward reared to attest and cement the unity of Israel, was a poor device, which would not have been needed if the people had observed the practice of thrice a year gathering at God’s center, Shiloh.

II. JOSHUA REBUKED THE INERTNESS OF THE PEOPLE

And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, “**How long are ye slack to go in to possess the land, which the Lord God of your fathers hath given you?**” (18:3).

Forth with the twenty-one commissioners arose to walk through the land, surveying it. They embodied the results in a book, in which the land was described by cities in seven portions. This they brought to Joshua. It may be that the account of what they had seen was the means under God of arousing the people from the apathy into which they had sunk.

In our own time the Spirit of God has been sending out many commissioners to pass through and describe the good land into which the heavenly Joshua would fain lead his people. A good many books have resulted from their investigations, which have mightily stirred the hearts of God’s people, so that in great numbers they have gone up to possess. And we would fain hope that even these words may incite Christian hearts that they may be no longer slack to go in to possess the land which the God of our fathers has given us in Jesus.

There is the portion of Benjamin, the beloved of the Lord, to dwell in safety by him, covered all the day long, and borne between his shoulders the place where Eastern mothers cradle their babes, giving them warmth and easy carriage.

There is the portion of Zebulun, to whose shores the illimitable ocean washes the treasures of the deep; in whose heart Gennesaret lies, with its fragrant memories of God manifest in the flesh.

There is the portion of Issachar which derived treasures from the sands, emblems of the precious stones, the pearls and crystals of spiritual character.

There is the portion of Asher, the oil of whose wine presses bespeaks the unction of the Holy Ghost; the strength of whose shoes betokens that invincible might which treads down serpent and scorpion.

There is the portion of Naphtali, satisfied with favor, and full of the blessing of the Lord; owning rich forests, the circle of Galilee, and the garden of Palestine.

Each of these is significant of spiritual endowment, which we ought to arise to possess.

Too long have we been slack to go in to possess that fullness of the Holy Spirit which might be in us as a living spring, making us perfectly satisfied; like the fountain in the court-yard of a beleaguered castle which enables the garrison to defy the siege. There is a knowledge of Jesus, a participation in his victory, a realization of blessedness, which are as much beyond the ordinary experience of Christians as Canaan was better than the wilderness. But of all this we, alas! know so little.

The causes of this inertness are many.

We shrink from spiritual attainment, because it entails self-denial, the sacrifice of darling but questionable things, together with the ascent of heights where the air is rare, and the muscles become strained, and the head swims. Our love of ease, our attachment to the world, our dread of being singular, our consciousness that we should have to forego much that we cherish, if we essayed to hold fellowship with the Holy God all these things prevail over us as the bird-lime which detains the fluttering tenants of the air from their native element.

But how much we miss! The nomad life, with its frail tents, could not afford those seven tribes of Israel so much lasting enjoyment as their own freehold in Canaan. What were the pasture-lands of the desert as compared to the oliveyards and vineyards of Esdraelon or Galilee?

But the comparison is utterly inadequate to portray the loss to which we subject ourselves in refusing to appropriate and enjoy the blessedness which is laid up for us in Jesus. The yielded life; the members presented to Christ for his use, and held at his disposal; the cleansed heart; the victory over sin; the singleness of purpose; the unbroken fellowship; the Pentecostal Fullness! Let us come to our Joshua at Shiloh, and ask him to lead us into each of these.

III. JOSHUA RECEIVED HIS OWN INHERITANCE

“The children of Israel gave him the city that he asked, even Timnath-serah, in the hill country of Ephraim” (19:50). In the following book it is spoken of as Timnath-heres (Judges 2:9). It was *“the portion of the sun.”*

The old veteran had deserved well of his people, and must have been glad to retire to his estate, on which the remaining twenty years of his life were spent. And the greatness of his influence may be inferred by considering the evils that overwhelmed Israel when he was taken, as the sea rushes in when the sea-wall is down. His very presence among the people was a restraint.

As for him and his house, he served the Lord, and maintained the sacred rites which Moses had enjoined; so that his example shone like a beacon-light and kept the darkness at bay. What a significant testimony to his consistency and steadfastness is furnished by the record, "**The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua.**"

He was like the central pillar which supports the entire weight of the roof of some chapter-house, with its Gothic roof, and its exquisite foliage of carved stone.

There is fascination in the name of his inheritance.

The portion of the sun! Did it lie specially open toward the sun, catching the first glimpse of sunrise, and holding the last fading gleam of sunset? Perhaps so. But there seems a special beauty in the name when we associate it with his previous career of unswerving fidelity to the will of God. Like Caleb, he had wholly followed the Lord. And as the course of the one ended in fellowship, the course of the other ended in that dwelling in the Light which is the highest bliss within man's reach.

Be wholly given to God, then you too shall live in the light, as he is in the Light.

- The warmth of his love shall fill your emotions with its glow, and teach you the art of love;
- The light of his truth shall banish obscurity and ignorance from your mind, and endow it with direct and certain knowledge;
- The ray of his presence shall inspire you with strength, vigor, elasticity, immortal youth.

Where sunshine is, there is life, health, gladness, vigorous strength.

IV. JOSHUA ALSO MADE PROVISION FOR THE MAN-SLAYER

Six cities were apportioned, three on each side of the Jordan, central to the adjacent districts, and easily accessible.

Thither the manslayer who had killed any person unwittingly and unawares might flee from the pursuit of the next of kin. The roads were kept in good repair; clearly written directions at the cross-ways indicated the route; and, according to Jewish tradition, runners, learned in the law, were stationed at various stages to direct and help the fugitive.

Once within the city walls, all breathless with his flight, the manslayer waited at the entering of the gate of the city till he had stated his case to the elders, who had the right of admitting him provisionally into the city.

On the appearance of the avenger of blood, the cause seems to have been finally adjudicated; and if it were clearly shown before the assembled people that there was no animosity in the blow which caused death, the manslayer was permitted to remain there, until the death of the high-priest then in office.

It is interesting to note this provision, made in the Land of Promise, for the passing over of sins which were not sins of presumption.

For the latter no provision was made. But, for wrongs which did not emanate from a fixed or rooted malice, there was, as in the case of sacrifices for sins of ignorance under the Levitical code, this merciful provision.

Take heart, O Christian soul! thou hast done many evil things, in thy ignorance or thoughtlessness, for which thou art justly guilty, and which might well exclude thee from the Land of Promise; yet, there is forgiveness for thee. Only get thee to the City of Refuge, which is also the city of the priests, and hide thee there; thou wilt not only be safe, but shalt enjoy thine inheritance beside, for the High Priest has died, and in His death has put away thy sin forever; there is therefore now no condemnation for thee, because thou art in him.

The Jews specially have acted the part of the man-slayer. They killed the Prince of Life, but they did it in ignorance (Acts 3:17, 18). Therefore they have lost their heritage; but they exist still as prisoners of hope, finding refuge among the cities of the priests, until such time as the Lord Jesus shall wrap up the present age as a worn-out vesture, and shall inaugurate that new and glorious reign in which he shall take to himself the kingdom.

Then Israel shall return, each to his own house, and unto the city from whence he fled.

V. JOSHUA APPORTIONED CITIES FOR THE LEVITES

There was an ancient curse hanging over the lots of Simeon and Levi.

Brethren by birth, they had been joint perpetrators in a dark crime, which had made Jacob, their father, to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and Perizzites.

The dying patriarch could not forget that deed of treacherous cruelty, and as it rose before his filming sight he said:

**“Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce;
and their wrath, for it was cruel:
I will divide them in Jacob,
and scatter them in Israel.”**

But this curse was not fulfilled in each case in the same way. With Simeon, it ran its course. Settled at the south of Canaan, between Judah and Philistia, this tribe became more and more nomadic, and finally faded out of corporate existence. In the case of Levi, it was transformed into blessing. The behavior of this tribe was very remarkable. At Sinai, when Moses called on all who were loyal to the Lord to gather in the gate of the camp, the Levites, to a man, answered his appeal. Phinehas, also, who took such decisive action in the matter of Baal-peor, was a Levite perhaps even a typical one. Whereupon The Lord entered into a covenant of life and peace with them, took them as a substitute for the first-born sons of Israel, and pledged himself to be their inheritance (Numbers 18:20; Joshua 13:33).

At the divine command, forty-eight cities were given to the Levites, with one thousand cubits of pasture-land, measured outward from the city walls. There they dwelt when not required for temple-service, or when they were incapacitated by age from attending on their sacred office.

As Jacob predicted, they were scattered; but the effect was most salutary.

They permeated the whole land with the hallowing influence of Shiloh. What a halo of sacred interest must have gathered round the man whose lot it was to enter into the temple of God and burn incense at the solemn hour of prayer! Then multiply this a thousandfold, and consider what a wide and wholesome effect must have been produced throughout the country, especially when Levi fulfilled the lofty possibilities of its high calling.

Moreover, the teaching of the law was a special prerogative of the Levites, who appear to have traveled through their apportioned districts. They taught Jacob his judgments, and Israel his law; as well as put incense and whole burnt-offering on the altar. They caused the people to discern between the unclean and the clean, and in a controversy stood to judge. They acted as the messengers of the Lord of Hosts (Deuteronomy 33:10).

So the work was finished.

“There failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass” (Joshua 21:43-45).

And this is true still. Our Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ. He has withheld no good thing. In Jesus all fullness dwells; all that is needed for life and godliness. We are complete in him. If there is failure, it is ours, not his. If the Book of Judges succeeds to that of Joshua, it is because God’s heirs yield to unbelief and sin.

In the eternity, which is at hand, as we stand together and review our life course with its battles and marches and experience, its losses and gains, its heights of privilege and depths of failure we shall without doubt take up and repeat the glad confession of these noble words, and confess that no good thing failed us of aught that the Lord had spoken, but that all came to pass.

~ end of chapter 19 ~

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