

# Joshua

And  
The Land of Promise

by

F. B. Meyer, B.A.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### THREE DAYS PAUSE

(Joshua 1:2; 2)

“God’s fashion is another: day by day,  
And year by year, he tarrieth; little need  
The Lord should hasten.”

- Myers

THE whole land of Canaan was Israel’s by deed of gift. As soon as Lot had separated from Abraham, choosing all the plain of Jordan, and pitching his tent toward Sodom, the Lord drew near his faithful servant, assuring him that he would not suffer him to lose by his magnanimity. “**Arise,**” said the divine voice, “**walk through the land in the length of it, and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee**” But, after that, when Melchizedek had blessed him, and he had watched through the long hours with God, beneath the horror of the great darkness, “**The Lord made a covenant with him, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.**”

But though this was so, each square mile of it had to be claimed from the hand of the peoples that possessed it. “**The sole of the foot**” had to be put down to claim and take. The cities were theirs, but they must enter them; the houses which they had not built were theirs, but they must inhabit them; the cornfields in the rich vales and the vineyards on the terraced slopes were theirs, but they must possess them.

It is not difficult for us to realize these things, for spiritually we occupy precisely a similar position. God our Father hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus; but they are not ours to enjoy until we have claimed and appropriated them by a living faith. They are only ours as we avail ourselves of them. Hence the need to “**be strong and very courageous.**”

But now a new and unexpected delay took place. A three days pause was called for. The officers informed the people that three days must pass before they could go in to possess the land which the Lord their God was giving them to possess.

## I. WHAT THIS PAUSE MEANT

“**Three days**” is a recognized period in Scripture for death and resurrection. “**As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.**” “**On the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before him.**” It was, therefore, appropriate that this period should elapse ere the people could pass through symbolic death over to resurrection ground.

But there was another and deeper reason for the delay, which closely touches one of the greatest principles of the inner life.

When Israel reached its banks, the Jordan was in flood, and overflowing the low-lying lands on either side of its bed. It was the time of “**the swelling of Jordan,**” which in after-days was employed as an expression for overwhelming trouble. Before the gaze of the assembled hosts the turbid floods rushed on, swollen by melting snows far away on Hermon, and carrying trunks of trees and other debris torn from the banks in their impetuous descent. Its force and velocity, as it poured down from its upper basins to the immense depression of the Dead Sea, had gained for it the name of “Descender”; and this title was specially appropriate at such seasons as that at which Israel first beheld it.

Across the river stood Jericho, embosomed in palms and tamarisks, in a very paradise of exquisite vegetation, its aromatic shrubs and gardens scenting the air. But as the people beheld it, all their cherished hopes of taking it by their own energy or courage must have been utterly dissipated. What could they do in face of that broad expanse of rushing, foaming, turbulent waters? The Jordan, on the page of Scripture, is constantly associated with death.

This indeed is its common characteristic. Not the death of the body; but that baptism into death which signifies a pause in the energies of nature, and an entrance through faith on a higher and nobler level. So John baptized there; and there the Lord entered into his first identification with sins not his own. But never in all its history did the Jordan more effectually pronounce the sentence of death than on that day when it taught the people that by no strength or energy of their own could they prevail.

Multitudes have come to the brink of that river, and have been left there, waiting on its banks, that they might consider the meaning of those impassable waters, and carry away the sentence of death in themselves.

- Abraham waited there for more than twenty years, face to face with the apparent impossibility of ever having a son.
- David waited there for almost as long; and it must have seemed that the kingdom foretold to him as a youth lay on the other side of insurmountable difficulties.
- The sisters of Bethany waited there; and the stone, rolled heavily to the door of the tomb where Lazarus lay, must have been to them all that the Jordan was to Israel - the knell of hope.
- Many a saint since then has been brought down to these same banks, and has stood to witness these flowing streams.

What though the promise of God has offered all manner of blessedness and delight! That river! Always that river! That flooded, fordless, bridgeless, boatless river! Are you there now, my reader? Do not hasten from it. Stand still and consider, until the energy and impetuosity of your self-life dies down. You can never reach the Blessed Life by resolutions, or pledges, or forms of covenant; your good self is as powerless now as your bad self was formerly; you must learn that your strength is to sit still, and that the rich blessings of God stored in Christ for you are an absolute gift to be received by the outstretched hand of faith. What a marvelous expression that is concerning the faith of Abraham!

**“And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara’s womb”** (Romans 4:19).

Not many could have long stood such considerations without losing all the faith they ever possessed. There was one secret, however, that sustained him. **“He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief.”**

Turning from the one to the other, he wavered not. These are the only conditions on which the vision of the river will not hurt us; if only we turn from it to the Presence of the Captain of the Lord’s Host, and to the covenant which is ordered in all things and sure. Then we shall wax strong through faith, and be fully assured that what God has promised he is able also to perform.

## **II. HOW THIS PAUSE WAS SPENT**

During this space of three days events transpired which are both interesting and typical. Amongst other things Jericho was entered by the two spies.

*(1) Jericho may fitly stand for the world of men over which judgment is impending, but which goes on its way unheeding.*

The blue sky spread its canopy overhead; the sun rose and set; the fields were ripened for harvest; the vintage was preparing; youth and beauty with linked hands pursued a flower-strewn path; but within a fortnight a blow was to fall from which the city would not rally for centuries.

The great majority of the people were either bent on stubborn resistance, or boasted themselves on their river and their walls. Their iniquity was full. And no proclamation was made to them, no terms proposed, no embassy sent. But there was one soul in their midst who was capable of faith, and was already exercising it. And he who had nurtured Rahab, and led her to the point which she had reached, was bent on perfecting what he had commenced, and on leading her into the fullest light which that age possessed.

This is ever God’s way.

- If there is but one righteous man in Sodom, he cannot destroy the city till his angels have brought him forth.
- If there is but one doubter among the apostles, he will not leave him comfortless, but will come to him with unmistakable tokens.

- Wherever there is a Rahab, who, amid much sin and ignorance, is living up to the truth she has, and longs for more, God will take her hand and lead her to himself.

He discerns a touch on his robe, and stays his footsteps till he has fully healed. A Nathanael beneath the fig-tree, a eunuch in his chariot, a Cornelius praying beside the sea, are not overlooked amid the crowds of careless souls around. They are as jewels on a heap of cinders, which are eagerly espied and taken up, polished, and placed amid the divine regalia.

Two references are made in the New Testament to Rahab's faith (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25).

It was true faith, though exercised only toward a fragment of the truth. It is not the amount of truth that a man holds which him; but the grasp with which he holds it. All that Rahab knew was that God had delivered his people from Pharaoh, and had promised to give them that land; and she believed it: and it was accounted to her for righteousness. And the evidences of her faith were quick to follow.

She came into antagonism with the world-spirit as represented in the king of Jericho; she sent the spies out by another way. She identified herself with Israel by the scarlet thread; she gathered her kinsfolk under her roof; her window looked toward Israel, whilst her door stood open to shelter many a fugitive; and though her faith was not as yet sufficiently strong to deliver her entirely from the fear of man which brought the snare of lying, yet she was commended to the care of Israel, and became a link in the ancestry of the Son of Man.

Rahab, the poor outcast of Jericho, who had this strange faith in God, entered in with the people to possess the land that flowed with milk and honey.

She is thus the type of Gentile sinners who are permitted to share in the unsearchable riches of Christ; to sit with him in the heavenlies; to form part of that new race which is gathering around the true Joshua, the Lord from Heaven.

- We were not a people; but are now the people of God.
- We had not obtained mercy; but have now obtained it.
- We were far off; but are now made nigh by the blood of Christ.
- So then we are no more strangers or sojourners; but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.

Only let us avail ourselves of our heritage!

*(2) During this brief pause Joshua also had an opportunity of ascertaining the feelings of the two tribes and a half.*

He discovered that they were fully prepared to discharge the obligation into which they had entered with Joshua, and to march with the other tribes to the conquest of Canaan. But they were equally set on returning to the rich pasture lands of Gilead, and Bashan, which Moses gave them beyond Jordan, toward the sunrising. They had "**much cattle**" (Numbers 32:2, 4, 19, 33).

Are not these the type of Christians to whom the Land of Promise is as freely open as to others, and who make an incursion into it with no thought of remaining? They are willing to mete and measure their strength with the seven nations of Canaan; but they are not prepared to abandon the strong fascinations of the world, and to settle down to a life hidden with Christ in God. Are there not among us those who have spent seven years in the Land of Promise, and have had hallowed experiences of blessedness, rest, and power; but have been swept off their feet and back by the receding tide of worldliness?

The end of such is but too clearly suggested by the fate of those Eastern tribes. They had their much grass; but they became gradually cut off from the corporate life of Israel. They gave few great names to the roll of saints and heroes emblazoned on Israel's story. They fell first beneath the invasions of Assyria, and were swept into captivity, from which they never returned. From such a lot may we all be saved! Rather be it our happy portion to be employed on the Lord's embassies in seeking souls; shown where to find them; taught how to deal with them; and enabled to lead them out into complete identification with the people of God.

### **III. HOW THE PAUSE ENDED**

On the third day the hosts seem to have come nearer the river's brink, and their tents were pitched for the night within close proximity to the hurrying waters. It was then that Joshua said unto the people, "**Sanctify yourselves; for to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you.**"

From which it would seem that the wonder-working power of God is dependent upon the sanctification of his people. When we ask the olden question, "Why art thou as a mighty man that cannot save?" we get the answer, which shows that we are to blame for the divine impotence, "**He could do no mighty works there, because of their unbelief.**"

We all want to see wonders wrought by God in our own characters, that the fir-tree may replace the thorn, and the myrtle the brier; in our homes, that the desert places may blossom with roses; in our churches, that they may arise and put on their beautiful garments. Oh for another Pentecost! Oh for a widespread revival of true godliness! Oh for the making bare of the right hand of the Most High! Oh to see converts fly as doves to their windows!

And why is it that we strain our eyes for them in vain? Is it not because we have not sanctified ourselves? Sanctification means the cleansing of the soul, and the putting on of the white robes of purity and humility. We are not clean enough for God to use us. We are not humble enough to bear a great success. It is perfectly true that we can only be wholly sanctified by the God of Peace. Holiness on its positive side is his indwelling and filling; but on its negative side it involves the putting away of known sin, or the being willing that he should cleanse it away from us by blood, or water, or fire.

Is this our condition? Have we laid aside our weights as well as our sins? Are we cleansed from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit? Are we able to say with the Apostle that we do not condemn ourselves in anything that we allow? If not, let us no longer complain that the days of wonders are over.

We are ourselves accountable for their having vanished, like peace from the criminal, and purity from the fallen. No wonder we are always dreading to-morrow. To-morrow with God, and without the wonders of his mighty arm, is indeed a dismal outlook.

But if only each one of us were to sanctify himself, putting off the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new man, renewed daily in the image of Christ; forsaking every form of evil, and hating even the garment spotted by the flesh; yielding himself to the two-edged sword of the great High- Priest we should find that wonders would begin and never cease; that the to-morrows would only unfold greater and better things than ever before; that Jordans would cleave, and Jerichos would fall. Then the Land of Promise would lie open with its immeasurable plenty, its oil and wine, its corn and honey, its precious priceless stores.

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