

Joshua

And
The Land of Promise

by

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN **LAND TO BE POSSESSED** (Joshua 13:1)

“Then be it so!
For in better things we yet may grow;
 Onward and upward still our way,
With the joy of progress from day to day;
 Nearer and nearer every year
To the visions and hopes most true and dear.”
- F. R. Havergal

Joshua was probably about ninety years of age when the conquest of Canaan was complete. But a very important part of his work had yet to be performed. It would not have been enough for him to have asserted Israel's supremacy over the Canaanites, unless he had taken measures to follow up his victories by settling the people in their stead. The work of destruction must be succeeded by that of construction. The warrior must give place to the administrator and statesman. The first step toward the occupation of Canaan was taken in the summons of the Lord to his servant, who had so faithfully performed all his word. Though he was old and well stricken in years, he was still the confidant of the Lord, the depositary of his secrets, the executor of his plans.

To bear fruit in old age, to put forth leaves and fruit amid the decay of physical vigor, to sweep on from the rapids of youth to the deep water of the river's mouth with ever-increasing fullness and abundance; to be as able to build up the people of God in the golden autumn as to lead them to victory in the early spring - this is no common honor, no ordinary achievement. And it was a high tribute to Joshua, that when he had overstepped the ordinary limit of human life by twenty years, he was summoned to put the crown on the work of his life.

The method adopted seems to have been, first, a careful survey of the land not yet possessed; then its apportionment among the several tribes according to their size; and lastly the actual appropriation and acquisition of each portion by the efforts of the tribe to which it was assigned.

It is with the first of these that we have now to deal.

After the divine voice had summoned the veteran leader to the last great work of his life, it proceeded to enumerate the portions of land that yet remained; and some time after, when seven of the tribes were as yet unsettled and there was urgent need for the completion of the task, twenty-one commissioners were appointed to pass through the land and examine it, and make a report concerning it to Joshua at Shiloh.

It would be interesting, did space permit, to examine the area designated by the divine Spirit. This at least we must notice as we pass, that it included all the region of Philistia, inhabited by some of the stoutest foes that Israel ever encountered, and who were a perpetual source of weakness and danger till the times of the kings. There were also the rich pasture-lands of the south; and in addition the luxuriant plain of Phoenicia and the fertile upland valleys, cooled by the snow-capped summits and watered from the rills of Lebanon, all portions of the land on which Israel had always a very slender hold. Compare this outline sketch of the divine intentions with the territories then actually held and afterward possessed by Israel; and the difference between God's ideal and their real inheritance becomes very striking.

The same appalling contrast appears when we recall the original promise made to Joshua at the beginning of this book.

"From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your border."

Yet, as a matter of fact, Israel filled up the measure of this prediction for once only, and for a very short time, during its tenure of Canaan.

Solomon did for a brief space realize the divine ideal; but the radiant glory of his kingdom was soon hemmed in and obscured by the clouds that drew up their dark veils over the sky. Men have sometimes used this as an argument against the divine veracity. It should rather be quoted as a melancholy confession of human frailty, and of failure to claim and appropriate the promises of God. There is no变ability in God. It is impossible even for our unbelief to make his promises of none effect.

Let us consider whether there may not be a similar contrast between that which God has intended for us and that which we have made our own.

Spread out in the Bible, and set forth in the life of Jesus, there is for us, as for Joshua, a map of what God desires for his people. Mere, as in a divine Doomsday-book, is a list of the mountains of vision and the valleys of blessing; of the green pasture-lands and the waters of rest; of the cities we may occupy and the foes we may expel.

All is mapped out for us; and we shall do wisely to carefully ponder it, that we may be humbled as we see the slow progress we have made, and may be stirred up to apprehend all that for which we were apprehended in Christ Jesus.

I. IN THE DIRECTION OF KNOWLEDGE

We must distinguish between intellectualism and knowledge.

It is not so difficult to acquire the former, with all those aids for acquiring information which abound around us. The very newspaper press, awaking to discover that man has other needs than those of the politician, is beginning to bring the discoveries of science and the contents of books to our breakfast tables. Leisure and taste, memory and mental discipline, observation and society will do a good deal toward imparting that strange veneer called culture; but this is a very different thing from knowledge.

A man may be utterly destitute of culture, and yet may have that direct and intuitive perception of truth which as much surpasses it as the blue of Heaven does the painted scenery of a theater. Whereas a man may be quick, clever, intellectual, well-informed, and able to lay his hands readily on his information, and yet be utterly destitute of the true knowledge.

God meant us to know himself even as Jesus knew him, in his human life. Remember how often he said, I know him. No mist ever crept up between the outspread landscape of God's nature and the loving, ravished gaze that swept over it; passing from the high mountains of his righteousness to the great sea of his judgments; and dwelling with rapture on the verdant tracts of his love and pity and grace, on the mighty rivers that represent the fertilizing out-goings of his being, and on the wealth of that blessed existence, like a summer-land, every inch of which is full of ripening fruit. Such knowledge, high and wonderful though it be, and unattainable by our own endeavors, is brought within our reach by our Blessed Lord. He gives us eternal life in order that we might know the only true God. He bids us stand on Calvary that we may behold the heart of the Father. He reveals God to us in his own life, so that to know him is to know God. And yet how little do we know the Father! We know little about him, and less of him by personal intimacy and fellowship.

To take the lowest test, our knowledge of God's Word. Whilst some individual explorers have pressed on into unknown and untrodden lands, the large majority of professing Christians are content with a few familiar and well-trodden patches. They read and read again the same passages in the Gospels, the Psalms, or Isaiah; but they never venture into the unexplored territory beyond. And the saddest point of all is that they have no deeper perception of the words which have become so familiar to them than at the first. They are like the busy crowds which pass lightly over the graves of martyrs, obliterating the sacred inscriptions, and missing the deeper thoughts which crowd in on the historian who bends over them in reverent meditation.

There are many subjects which the bulk of Christian people, by a tacit understanding, refuse to enter. Such are, amongst others, the Second Advent; the Restoration of Israel, and its future mission to mankind; the great question of fulfilled and unfulfilled prophecy; the mystical union of Christ with those who believe in him.

In all these respects there is much land to be possessed. Well may we be rebuked by the example of the Psalmist, who took days and nights to master his scanty and meager Bible!

We have much to learn from Nehemiah and many other characters in Holy Writ, whose prayers and songs are little else than chains of Scriptural quotations. Let us mend our ways, not always traverse the well-trodden paths, but seek for a completer acquaintance with the entire range of truth as given in God's Word.

And if we know comparatively little of the Bible, we know less of God.

Some of us dwell on one trait of his character, in complete ignorance of others. We magnify his mercy at the expense of his righteousness; or his justice at the cost of his grace. Our knowledge of him, moreover, is borrowed from hearsay evidence, and from the reports of others. We do not hear and know him for ourselves. We are not content to know at second-hand the symphonies of Beethoven or the pictures of Murillo. And we ought not to rest content till we can say with the patriarch, "**I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee.**"

Oh to know God, to follow on to know him, until he break on our hearts as the morning or as the early rain! What ecstasy there is in discovering new traits of character, new beauties in our friends, as we come across some undreamed-of excellence! So there would be a new meaning in life, if we began to explore what is to many of us a *terra incognita*, the Being of God. There is much land here to be possessed.

II. IN THE DIRECTION OF CHRISTIAN ATTAINMENT

In us, as in Canaan of old, there are the seven nations of sin.

Hereditary tendencies to evil; unholy habits that have entrenched and fortified themselves; worldly compliances which have become part of our existence. When first we became Christians we made a determined onslaught on these things, and met with much success; but we have become weary of incessant watchfulness and conflict. We have no taste for the girt loin and the erect, alert, soldier-attitude. Our heart is only touched here and there by Christ; and our peace is incessantly broken by the raids of those unextirpated evils, which swoop down from time to time, carrying everything before them. There is much land still to be possessed.

Would it not be well to enumerate the points in which we are deficient not in a spirit of morbid self-scrutiny, but of honest self-analysis? Is not the first step toward an amended life a clear appreciation of what needs amending? We may well turn from our own efforts at self-knowledge, and bare our hearts to the inspection of the Spirit of God; asking him to search us and show us what wicked way there is in us ere he leads us in the way everlasting.

In some cases it is the business life, the workshop, or the counting-house, which is not possessed by Christ, and is kept altogether and constantly outside the range of his influence. In other cases it is the social element, or the home-relationships of our nature which are not brought into captivity to Him. The spirit is yielded, but not the soul; or the soul, but not the body. We accept God's reign over the principal departments of our being; but there are certain outstanding habits over which we are reluctant to admit his sway.

Consider how great is God's ideal for each of us.

To be “**conformed to the image of his Son**”!

Scan his fair proportions; his strength and sweetness; his holiness and pity; his hatred of sin and love to the sinner; his devotion to God; his life of self-sacrifice for man. Is that God’s ideal? And does he predestinate each of us to be conformed to it? Then who of us need renounce hope? But ah, how much there is to be possessed! How little do we possess of his beauty or strength or tenderness or holiness!

The soul is first possessed by Christ, and then it begins to possess Christ.

We are apprehended by our divine Captor, and then we come to apprehend him. We open our hearts to receive him into their depths, and then learn to appropriate him by a living faith.

In other words, consecration must precede appropriation.

But when once the act of consecration is complete, we may begin to possess him. This blessed habit may be initiated in a single act; but it is built up by a series of such acts, which are maintained, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, till it becomes as natural for us to look up to Jesus and to claim whatever we need as to breathe.

Ah, soul! why pine in poverty and starvation? Is it not because thou hast withheld thyself from Jesus? Arise, and yield thyself to Him! Let him possess thee; and then do thou claim a reciprocal possession of thy Lord. Thus shalt thou begin to enter upon thine eternal inheritance, and commence to expend thyself on pursuits that shall engage thee when sun and moon are no more.

III. IN THE DIRECTION OF THE GIFTS OF THE Holy Ghost

“To each one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.”

And the context clearly shows that this is not the common grace needed for daily living; but the special gifts of grace of the Pentecostal fullness of the Holy Ghost, acquired for us by the ascended Lord.

If we understand the teaching of the Epistles aright, there is for each member of the mystical body of Christ a distinct share in the Pentecostal gift. We may describe it as a share in his baptism or in his fullness. This is immaterial. But there is surely something more than is ordinarily understood by regeneration, or the gift of faith, or the revelation of the living Saviour. There is a power, an overflowing love, an assurance, an exuberant joy, a freedom, which are not enjoyed by all Christians, but which are as evidently their birthright as they are to be desired.

And, in addition, there are the bestowments of the Holy Spirit, by which we are specially qualified to do Christ’s work in the world. Tact in leadership; wisdom to win souls; power to help believers into a fuller life; utility to administer, or to speak, or to teach; sympathy, facility in utterance, power in prayer. These may be named amongst others.

The whole continent of Pentecostal blessing is avoided by many believers as if it were full of swamps, of fever, noisome pestilence; it stands upon their globes as Africa did in the days of our childhood. There is surely in this direction much land to be possessed.

But oh, let us not be content simply to know our failures and deficiencies!

Let us arise and quit ourselves like men. Let us ask our heavenly Joshua to settle us in this good land; so that there may be no rill or valley or mountain or tract of territory unpossessed. God has given us in Christ all things which pertain unto life and godliness; let us claim the whole of our inheritance by a living faith, so that we may enter on the enjoyment of all that is possible for us on this side of Heaven.

~ end of chapter 16 ~

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