

The Companion of the Way

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE SUPREME COMMANDER (Joshua 5) - Joshua

I. THE SETTING -- PRELUDE TO CONFLICT

The years of Israel's wandering had passed. The feet often weary on the desert way stood at last in the land of promise. Nought had failed of all that the Lord had spoken to His people. Moses, their leader, had been called to Mount Nebo, where he was shown all the land which the tribes should possess, and was thence called to Heaven, there to rest till upon another mount, the holy mount, he would stand in glory with his Lord. In his place was Joshua, who would lead Israel across Jordan and into the possession of their inheritance in the land.

Neither in the desert nor in the land could the nation prosper save through the divine blessing and the divine presence. Accordingly, when Moses was taken from the sphere of his toil, and Joshua stood alone with his burden, the Lord spoke to him words which renewed the promise given to Moses at the burning bush. "**Certainly I will be with thee,**" said GOD to Moses as He sent him to Egypt to deliver the people (Exodus 3:12). "**As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee,**" said He to Joshua ere He bade him cross Jordan, and again, "**Be strong, and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest**" (Joshua 1:5, 9).

The happenings at Jordan were themselves true vindication of the promise of the presence, but there awaited Joshua that experience of the Lord that should meet his need in warfare, as the revelation to Moses in the bush had met the latter's need in the forty years. It was one thing to stand in the promised land; it was another to take possession of its length and breadth. "**Every place,**" said the Lord, "**that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses**" (Joshua 1:3). The land, however, was held by the kings of the Amorites and others, and it was necessary for these to be driven out. Years of conflict and conquest lay before the warriors of Israel, and they must battle courageously, but only by the power of their GOD could they prevail. Even so did Joshua remind them, "**The living God is among you, . . . he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites**" (Joshua 3:10). It was to be Israel's conquest -- yet not theirs, but GOD's.

Before the first victory, which taught its own significant lesson, in that the walls of Jericho were razed by act of GOD and not by human prowess, Joshua received the great favor of an appearing of his Lord. It was his privilege to hear the voice that had spoken to Abraham, to Jacob, and to Moses, and to behold the One who had ever been with His people for their guidance, preservation, and empowering. Ere his warfare began, there was granted to Joshua a fresh display of the perpetual presence which would invigorate his heart and set before him the spiritual

Conditions Indispensable to Victory.

As a young man he had stood upon the shore of the Red Sea when Moses and the children of Israel had sung unto the Lord and had spoken saying, "**I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: . . . The Lord is a man of war: . . . Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?**" (Exodus 15:1, 3, 11). Now beyond Jordan he stood with the weight of years upon him and the burden of the nation's welfare, and he must learn anew those things whereof they had sung.

Even with the vigor of the spiritual strength developed through those forty years, Joshua required yet more to appreciate the character of GOD and His claims upon him. Only thus would he be equipped for the forward march through the land and for all the problems that would confront him. The lessons he would learn were not for Joshua only but for us also who look back upon his life and around upon our modern age. It is the fresh vision that leads to the fresh victory. To content ourselves with past experience of His presence, past glimpses of His face, and past hearings of His voice, is to forget that His fullness and power are alike inexhaustible and that His name is Jehovah, the name of unceasing promise. As Joshua stood in the land, but must tread in every place to possess it, so we have been "**blessed... with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ**" (Ephesians 1:3), but these require to be appropriated by faith for personal enjoyment. As there were foes to challenge Joshua's right to the land and to withstand his march, so there are mighty powers of darkness which challenge us whenever we seek to realize our high calling and to enter into our heavenly wealth. Woe to us if we seek to meet them in our own strength!

II. THE REVELATION -- THE SWORD OF THE LORD

"**And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked . . .**" (Joshua 5:13). Repeatedly in the Old Testament this expression occurs (to lift up the eyes and look) and with most solemn association. Thus it is used of Lot's gaze toward Sodom, and of GOD's bidding to Abraham: "**And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar . . . And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward**" (Genesis 13:10, 14); of Abraham at Mount Moriah, beholding the place and the substitute: "**Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off**" and "**And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt**

offering in the stead of his son" (Genesis 22:4, 13); of Isaac as his bride drew near: "**And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming**" (Genesis 24:63); of Balaam's contemplation of the people he was compelled to bless: "**And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him**" (Numbers 24:2); of GOD's bidding through Isaiah: "**Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth**" (Isaiah 40:26); and of Daniel's visions: "**Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last**" (Daniel 8:3) and "**Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz**" (Daniel 10:5). It indicates no casual glance, but the intent gaze, often with longing, with which the heart looks out in

Moments of Destiny.

Seeing that it is fraught with such importance, it is not surprising that it should be used of Abraham at Mamre when GOD visited His friend, of Jacob and Esau at their meeting, and of Daniel in the vision of GOD wherewith his earthly life was consummated. So Joshua in this scene, burdened with the nearness of the first city to be attacked and with the issues of the conflict, becoming conscious of the presence of a man who was outwardly a stranger to him, looked with keen eyes upon this One who confronted him.

We do well to pause and remind ourselves that we need to be men of uplifted eyes, who in every time of choice and crises and on every occasion that makes new demands upon us look with set purpose to the face of the Son of GOD. Lifting our gaze from the earthly to the heavenly, from our need to His fulness, and seeking Him who yearns to answer every longing of the heart toward Him, we shall not be disappointed.

"And, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand" (Joshua 5:13). Once more the Lord of Heaven deigned to present Himself in appearance as a man. His identity was not at first known to Joshua, but His acceptance of worship, His direction to Joshua to loose the shoe from his foot, and His use of the title, "**Captain of the host of the Lord,**" combine to indicate who He was beyond all doubt. It was a true theophany, and, as ever, it was in the person of the Son that GOD was revealed. As befitting the occasion, He was seen holding

A Naked Sword.

That sword could not rest, for the land was in the power of those whose iniquity was full. As the Lord had executed judgment against the Egyptians for their sins, so must He execute judgment against the nations of Canaan. The driving out of those nations was not only necessary to the giving of inheritance to Israel but was merited by the appalling sins with which they had defiled the land. Since the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, GOD had been longsuffering toward the inhabitants of Canaan, but the lesson had gone unheeded, and the time had come for the land to be cleansed.

Very early in human history was the sword of GOD seen. When the peace of Eden was disturbed by the sin of our first parents, GOD "**drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life**" (Genesis 3:24). The flaming sword set forth the character of the throne of GOD, of which the cherubim were the attendants and ministers; GOD's holiness demanded that the way of the tree of life be closed to the sinner.

Yet again the sword gleamed, but to find its sheath in the heart of the substitute for sinners. At Calvary there was fulfilled the saying of the prophet, "**Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts**" (Zechariah 13:7).

Barred to me that heavenly Eden
Till the flaming sword,
In GOD's righteous wrath uplifted,
Smote Thee, O my Lord

And now the Heaven of heavens stands open to the believing sinner, for the throne is satisfied, and the Saviour slain on the Cross is the Saviour exalted at GOD's right hand.

Thus the glory outside the garden of Eden and the sacrifice without the gate of Jerusalem both proclaimed the inflexible nature of GOD's dealings with sin. In Joshua's day the sword was drawn against the sins of the Canaanites, but the power that made Jericho defenseless before the warriors of Israel made those same warriors helpless before the men of Ai, and the Lord's verdict on their defeat was "**Israel hath sinned**" (Joshua 7:11). GOD has

No Differing Standards

for His foes and for His friends, so that sword was drawn also against the sin of Israel. This is seen markedly on two other occasions when Scriptures speaks of the One with "**His sword drawn in His hand.**" When Balaam persisted in going to Balak, and his ass "**speaking with man's voice forbid the madness of the prophet**" (II Peter 2:16). "**Balaam said unto the ass, . . . I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee . . . Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: . . . And Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, I have sinned**" (Numbers 22:29, 31, 34).

Again, when David sinned in numbering the people, "**God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it . . . And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem: . . . And David said unto God . . . even I it is that have sinned**" (I Chronicles 21:15-17).

The hireling prophet and the shepherd king were met by the same One with the same sword.

The lesson is imperative to victory and to fellowship with the victorious Lord that on GOD's part there can be

No Truce With Sin.

That His grace has made us His own is no excuse for sin in our lives. It is not for us to presume upon grace. **"Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid"** (Romans 6:1, 2). If we would know our Lord as the mighty One who gives victory over every foe without, we must first know Him as the holy One who condones no sin within us.

"And Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come" (Joshua 5:13-14).

Not Merely As An Ally

revered and welcome must he be known to Joshua, but as supreme commander. Before He could unfold the plan of victory, He must be given His true place and honored with His rightful dignity. All sovereignty was His. Hence He spoke the word that proclaimed Himself as Captain and that bowed Joshua at His feet. The phrase **"host of the Lord"** is peculiar to the people as they left Egypt and entered Canaan. Of the Exodus it is said that **"all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt"** (Exodus 12:41).

From the first chapter of I Samuel the Old Testament writers speak not of the host of the Lord but of **"the Lord of hosts."** This title views armies, both heavenly and earthly, of angels and of men, as subject to the one Lord of all. His majesty and His power have surrounded His throne with shining myriads who do His will and of whom it is said, **"The host of heaven worshippeth thee"** (Nehemiah 9:6). His people Israel were likewise His host, but they often rebelled against Him. When at Kadesh-barnea they refused to enter the land of promise, they dishonored the divine captain and appointed from among themselves a captain to lead them back to the bondage of Egypt: **"And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt"** (Numbers 14:4) and **"And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not"** (Nehemiah 9:17). Would Joshua and his people receive the blessing of an omnipotent commander? Then must they submit themselves unreservedly to His authority.

The Captain of the host of the Lord is none other than the Captain of our salvation: **"For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings"** (Hebrews 2:10). This latter title takes cognizance also of the Lord's own path through this world in lowly manhood, for the word here rendered "captain" combines two thoughts. He is the author, the source of salvation; He is also the leader in the way, He effects deliverance, and as deliverer He goes before. In this title, "salvation" refers to the whole of His deliverance of His people from its beginning at their conversion to its consummation at their glorification. The title is rich in its certainty, for it is attested by the crown of glory and honor upon the victor's brow. It is rich in its promise, for it speaks not of a captain of defeat, but of **"the captain of their salvation."** His leadership knows no failure. **"Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ"** (II Corinthians 2:14).

"And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant?" The secret of Joshua's greatness, as that of all the men of GOD in Scripture, is seen in his exercise Godward. Had we only the record of David's wanderings and warfare, we would know him as a warrior, but we would not know the real David. For this we must read his psalms and listen to the breathings of his soul in trial, in penitence, in rejoicing, and in adoration. We would not know the real Paul had we only the record of his journeys and not the intensely biographical passages of II Corinthians and Philippians. Similarly, it is Joshua's humility and worship before his Lord and obedience to Him that underlies his military prowess and his consistent witness to the Lord's power.

Worship is that unreserved homage of the creature which is to be rendered to the CREATOR alone; it is the prostration of heart in the presence of Deity. The realization of that presence should fill believing hearts with gladness; it must ever fill them with awe. Worship springs from appreciation of the greatness of GOD, the wonders of His attributes and ways, and, most of all, His revelation in His Son. With Joshua, worship was no formal thing; its reality was attested by the

Completeness of His Submission.

Placing himself entirely at the disposal of the One before whom he lay with his face on the earth, he sought at once to know His will. **"What saith my lord unto his servant?."** The emphasis of the inquiry rests on the words, **"my lord."** Like the apostle who saw the wounds in the body of the risen CHRIST, gazed into His face, and spoke forth his adoration in the words, **"My Lord and my God"** (John 20:28), Joshua in the address, **"my lord,"** owned His claims upon him. So it was through all those years of unfaltering allegiance till that day when he said to the tribes, **"Choose you this day whom ye will serve, . . . as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"** (Joshua 24:15).

The path of blessing involves the active quest of the will of GOD. It is the exercised heart that is the guided heart. Our modern age is grievous because of the spiritual apathy of many who have been redeemed and the wastage of talent, gift, and years since there is so little seeking of the mind of GOD for His people's lives. The quest must be ceaseless. Had Joshua and the leaders of Israel remembered their necessary dependence upon the divine wisdom, they would not have been beguiled later by the Gibeonites, nor would it have been written of them that **"the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord"** (Joshua 9:14).

"And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so" (Joshua 5:15). The first word of the Man with the sword proclaimed the majesty of His own Person, and the second the unfitness of His servant, in spite of his privilege, to stand in any personal merit in His presence. The ground itself was holy because of the infinite and eternal holiness of its MAKER, who deigned to stand upon it. Accordingly, Joshua must show his own unworthiness and the reverence due to such august company by standing there with unshod feet. Not yet was a single word spoken concerning the approaching warfare or concerning Jericho and its capture. Joshua had sought his Lord's command. It had come, and he had obeyed at once. Even so had the Angel of the Lord spoken to Moses at the bush, and that before He proclaimed His purpose to deliver His people from Egypt. Only when Moses and when Joshua stood unshod in that presence could they hear

the revelation of the divine will for the path that lay ahead. Herein may we find the cause of much of our failure. We assay to meet the foe, but we go without GOD. We surround our Jericho, but its walls mock our endeavor. Dispirited and embittered we turn from the path that would have given most glory to our LEADER, and seek an easier task. But He looks for men who will stand in the secret of His presence and go out to triumph in His name.

III. THE BLESSING -- THE PROMISE OF VICTORY

Not till the servant was prepared for the message of victory did the Captain unfold the way in which Jericho would be taken. The sixth chapter of Joshua opens with a parenthesis touching the siege of the doomed city, but the second verse of the chapter continues the words of the Captain to Joshua. Here the narrative speaks of Him by the great name of "the Lord," which is the Lord GOD, or Jehovah, for Joshua had learned who He was, and had paid Him the homage which was due to none other. Well did he know the command of Moses, "**Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name**" (Deuteronomy 6:13). Consider also Matthew 4:10 "**Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.**"

"And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour" (Joshua 6:2). "**I HAVE GIVEN.**" It was

A Word of Absolute Power.

Nought could frustrate it. By His own act GOD cast down the walls of the city, and "**the people [Israel] went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.**" (Joshua 6:20). "**I have given.**" It was the word of One who, long after, ere ascending from Olivet to His throne, said, "**All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore . . . and, lo, I am with you alway**" (Matthew 28:18-20), and of One who, appearing in glory to John in Patmos, spoke of Himself as "**He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth**" (Revelation 3:7).

Does He not still speak to those who wait His holy will? Does He not say of every obstacle that raises itself to oppose His sovereign sway, "**I have given**"? GOD means all His people to be victorious, but not in their own strength. "**The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds**" (II Corinthians 10:4). When the presence of the living GOD is known and honored, when His people have no truce with sin, when they bow in adoring submission to His blessed will and learn to stand in humility and reverence before Him to receive His bidding, then the highway to victory lies open. It is theirs to go ahead, not in the tragedy of an incomplete obedience such as Israel was made to mourn in Judges 2, but in implicit confidence in the Captain of their salvation and in the wisdom of all that He commands.

"See, I have given."

~ end of chapter 4 ~