

Joshua

And
The Land of Promise

by

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CLAIMING VICTORY

(Joshua 11)

“Up! God has formed thee with a wiser view,
Not to be led in chains, but to subdue!
Calls thee to cope with enemies; and first
Points out a conflict with thyself the worst!”
- Cowper

THE Merom Waters, which must have become encrimsoned with the blood of men on that great day whose story we are now to tell, is described by travelers as one of the fairest scenes in Palestine. The lake is not large, but its blue waters are skimmed by myriads of water-fowl which make their home in the forests of wavy reeds growing at the northern point where the Jordan enters it. On the gentle undulation of the hills that slope to it on the western side all the episodes of pastoral life are transacted; whilst, from the farther side, the gaunt hills, two miles across, frown upon the placid scene.

To this sweet spot as mustering-place, Jabin, King of Hazor, aroused at last to fear and action by the tidings of the day of Gibeon, summoned all the tribes of the north of Canaan. Well would it have been for him speaking after the manner of men if he had not delayed so long, but had concentrated his forces in time to cooperate with Adonizedek, marching from the north simultaneously with the attack of the latter against Gibeon.

To compensate for his lost opportunity, he now sent messengers with speed to raise the country. Possibly he adopted words like those with which, in after years, Saul summoned Israel to follow him to Jabesh-Gilead, where he took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the borders of Israel, by the hand of messengers, saying, “**Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen.**”

Throughout the hills of Galilee the messengers sped to the far north beneath the shadow of Lebanon, all down the Valley of Esdraelon to Carmel, and along the shores of the Great Sea.

The Jebusite heard the summons in the hill country, and the Hivite under Hermon in the land of Mizpeh; and even some remnants of the shattered southern confederacy seem to have poured their scanty contribution into the accumulated ranks of that great host. **“They went out, they and all their hosts with them, much people, even as the sand that is upon the seashore in multitude.”**

It was no time for dalliance in the camp at Gilgal, whither Joshua had led back his warriors to recruit after their toils; and as soon as tidings reached him, he started with his army on the five days journey that intervened between Gilgal and Merom, and marched to perhaps the greatest battle of his life.

Josephus tells us that the united forces consisted of 300,000 foot, 100,000 horses, and 20,000 chariots. He says also that the Israelites were terrified at having to encounter the iron chariots which drove swiftly into the ranks of an opposing army, enabling the warriors to discharge their missiles with terrible effect. It may be that some tidings of the immense array that lay waiting for him within the circle of the hills reached Joshua when he was within a day’s march of the camp. A sense of the awfulness of the crisis may for a moment have thrilled his soul; but the steadfastness of his courage knew no shock, because, simultaneously with the tidings, there came the divine assurance, **“Be not afraid because of them; for to-morrow about this time I will deliver them up all slain before Israel.”**

Joshua repeated the tactics which had been so successful previously. He came against them suddenly, perhaps in the early dawn. As the Israelites fell upon them, the vast host was seized with panic. Angel hosts, no doubt, cooperated from the heavenlies with the armies of the Lord; and the vaunted pride of the kings bit the dust as they beheld the awful rout that followed. Thousands must have fallen beneath the avenging sword; whilst three great bodies of fugitives made their way, one to the city of Zidon, forty miles distant; one to the seacoast, where in after years Elijah sojourned with the widow; one to Mizpeh, sheltering under Hermon. The strength of the foe was broken; but for some years after this final victory Joshua carried on a campaign against the cities standing, each on its mound or hill, according to the custom of the time, from which Jabin and his allies had sallied forth to fight.

Hazor was burned, probably to intimidate the rest, being the most prominent in the alliance against Israel. For the rest, it was deemed sufficient to destroy the inhabitants that could bear arms, to render the horses useless, and to burn the chariots.

“As the Lord commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses.”

The Anakim warriors of extraordinary height, who had been the dread of Israel, were destroyed, together with their cities; and, nominally at least, the whole land passed into the hands of Israel.

I. IT WAS A DECISIVE VICTORY

Often before had the Canaanites rallied to oppose the progress of Israel; but never after this did they dare to meet them in battle array.

Their spirit was crushed, their power quelled. And herein we are reminded of the ascension of that greater Conqueror of whom Joshua was a type.

It is not improbable that those dark powers, who had opposed our Saviour throughout his earthly life, mustered for one last struggle as he left beneath his feet the cloud, bathed in the roseate light of dawn, that hid him from the eyes of his disciples. There is some trace of this in the words of the Apostle, who tells us that he was raised far above all rule, and authority, and power, employing the very terms afterward used of our conflict with the wicked spirits in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:21; 6:12).

But in any case he triumphed over all that opposed him. “**having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.**” And the Apostle, borrowing from one of the sublimest triumphal odes in the world, speaks of him as leading captivity captive (Colossians 2:15; Ephesians 4:8).

Through the prophetess Deborah the Spirit of God first uttered that significant phrase when celebrating Israel’s victory over a later Jabin, King of Hazor:

**“Arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive,
Thou son of Abinoam.”**

The thought undoubtedly is that when the down-trodden becomes at last the victor, he leads captive that which had led him and others in captivity. The captive-making tyrant becomes in turn a captive.

So it was when Jesus rose and ascended into Heaven. Up to that time Satan had usurped a supreme power over man; by the wiles of his temptations; by the witchery of the world; by the dread terrors of death and the grave; and by the virulence of his accusations. None had been able to withstand him, and it seemed as if devil-power must be forever triumphant over man over the strongest, as Samson; the wisest, as Solomon; the meekest, as Moses; the innocent, as Adam. But all this was reversed by the glorious deeds of our blessed Master, who, in His death, resurrection, and ascension defeated the devil, and demonstrated for evermore the supremacy of man in him over all the dark powers that infest the earth or air or heavenly places. “**He led captivity captive.**”

We can almost see the long line of princely captives following his triumphal car as he ascends the world, which he had overcome; death, which he had abolished; Hades, the keys of which were wrenched from it to hang henceforth at his girdle; the devil and his hosts; the principalities and powers of hell, led as a long line of slaves.

Never again need that conflict be repeated. It has been decisively demonstrated to the universe, and established forever, that though the first Adam was not able to withstand the assaults of the devil, but succumbed with all his race, yet the second Adam has proved himself more than conqueror; not for himself alone, but for all who are one with him by faith.

There may be war in Heaven; but it will largely resemble the warfare carried on by Joshua after his final victory harassing and difficult, perhaps, but of no importance as affecting the result of the successes already gained. If Jesus vanquished the powers of darkness when they hurled themselves on him in the hour of his weakness and mortal agony, is it to be supposed for a moment that they will be able to effect anything now that he sits at the right hand of God, girded with power and glory?

II. THIS VICTORY NEEDED TO BE FOLLOWED UP AND APPROPRIATED

Though the victories of Israel were decisive, yet there was a sense in which they were incomplete. It is true that Joshua destroyed the cities and those whom he found in them; but it would seem that many of the inhabitants had previously retired for safety to the rocky fastnesses or caves in the vicinity of their homes, so that as soon as the wave of conquest had passed over the land and subsided, they emerged from their hiding-places, and reoccupied their possessions in houses and lands from which they had been temporarily dislodged. This was according to the word of Moses, who had predicted this very state of things when he said, **“The Lord thy God will cast out those nations before thee by little and little; thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee.”**

It would have been in the highest degree impolitic to have exterminated all the inhabitants, for the land would have gone out of cultivation; the terraces, which were so needful in that hilly country, would have become broken down; and the water-courses would have fallen hopelessly out of repair. And all this in addition to the reason alleged by the great lawgiver that the wild beasts would have multiplied to an alarming and dangerous extent. How much wiser, then, that the displacement of the Canaanites should be by a gradual process. The victories of Joshua were decisive, but they were not final. They needed to be followed up by the various tribes. There was no more doubt as to their success in prosecuting their victories than there had been in winning them. The one was as much guaranteed by the divine promise as the other. In the same breath as Moses had proclaimed the gradual process of Israel’s settlement in the land of Canaan, he announced that the Lord their God would deliver their enemies up before them, discomfiting them with a great discomfiture till they were destroyed (Deuteronomy 7:23).

The sacred historian even affirms that it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, to come against Israel in battle, that he might utterly destroy them (Joshua 11:20). We must not suppose, of course, that God stepped in to produce, in the case of these Canaanites, a result which would not have accrued to them by the working out of the natural laws which he has instituted. God loved them as he loves the world. They were included in the propitiation of Christ. They might have been saved, as Rahab was. And when it is said that God hardened their hearts, we must understand that their hearts became hardened by sinning against their light; in accordance with that great principle which God has established, that if a man resists his convictions of right he becomes more inveterate in his sinful ways. God is thus said to do what is done by the working out of the laws of that moral universe which he has constituted. It is clear that the Canaanites knew that God was with Israel. Rahab said, **“I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard, . . . and as soon as we had heard it, our hearts did melt; . . . for the Lord your God, he is God in Heaven above, and on earth beneath”** (Joshua 2:9-11).

And the Gibeonites said, **“We have heard the fame of the Lord, and all that he did in Egypt”** (9:9, 10). There is no doubt, then, that throughout the land there had gone forth the fame of God; and when the kings flung their hosts in battle against Israel it was as it has always been:

**“The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the Lord, and against his Anointed.”**

But how rich is the spiritual lesson to be derived from the peculiarity of this gradual appropriation of Joshua’s achievements! **“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.”** Yet Israel had to fight over every inch of soil to drive out their conquered foes. So, as we have seen, our blessed Lord has won a decisive victory over all our foes; but we have to claim it repeatedly until, in the case of each of us, death, that last enemy, is destroyed.

The world is overcome; but we must overcome it by faith. The flesh has been nailed to the cross, and the old man has been done away; but we have by the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the body, that we may live. The devil has been vanquished once for all; but we have to hide ourselves in the Only-begotten, trusting him to keep us, so that the evil one may not touch us. The grave and death have been passed and left behind in the triumphal procession of the second Adam; but we must meet them, unless he come first, saying, as we approach them, **“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** We are more than conquerors in all things through him that loved us: but there never will be a day in our history when we shall not need to overcome by the word of our testimony and by the blood of the Lamb. Therefore the voice of the ascended Jesus speaks in sevenfold benediction to them that overcome.

There is no foe to your growth in grace, no enemy in your Christian work, no dreaded form of evil dominating and cursing the souls of men, which was not included in your Saviour’s conquests. You need not be afraid of them. When you touch them, they will flee before you. God has promised to deliver them up before you. Only be strong and very courageous! Fear not, nor be dismayed! The Lord is with you, O mighty men of valor mighty because one with the Mightiest. Claim victory! Whenever your enemies close in upon you, claim victory! Whenever heart and flesh fail, look up and CLAIM VICTORY! Be sure that you have a share in that triumph, which Jesus won not for himself alone, but for us all; remember that you were in him, when he won it and claim victory! Reckon that it is yours, and gather spoil. Neither the Anakim nor fenced cities need daunt or abash you. You are one of the conquering legion. Claim your share in the Saviour’s victory.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

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