

Joshua

And
The Land of Promise

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WARRIOR Christ

(Joshua 5:13-15)

“So let it be. In God’s own might
We gird us for the coming fight,
And, strong in him whose cause is ours
In conflict with unholy powers,
We grasp the weapons he has given
The Light and Truth, and Love of Heaven.”
- Whittier

“**IT came to pass.**” The time and exact locality are not defined; but they are not of much account in the presence of that marvelous episode which stands before the conquest of Canaan, as an illuminated capital before the black letterpress of some old missal. As to the time, it was probably the day in which the manna had ceased, and the Leader had realized that the land must now furnish the commissariat. As to the place, it is enough to know that it was by Jericho.

Behind lay the Jordan, the seam made by the passage of the host no longer discernible; though the fresh heap of memorial stones proclaimed the miracle of the dried river-bed. Beneath, under the shadow of the hill, lay the camp, where the people were resting from their long fatigues, in the first glad realization that their long journeyings were ended. Whilst five miles distant, on the path to Canaan, towering above the palm-groves, arose the strongly fortified walls of Jericho.

It must have been for Joshua, at least, a time of anxious suspense.

He could not forget how forty years before the former generation had cried out for bondage in Egypt, or graves in the desert, rather than face the terrors of fortified cities and giant champions. And what might not their children do! It had been comparatively easy to cope with Amalek, and Og, and Sihon, because they had met Israel in open war upon the field of battle; but that was a very different matter to attacking a city which was able to hold its own in a long siege.

It was impossible to leave it in the rear, unsubdued; but it was also suicidal to sit down before it to starve it to surrender. As the weary months dragged on, the energy of the people would evaporate, and the armies of their foes would gather. Eagerly must the lonely chieftain have longed for one moment with Moses, or, better still, with that Angel of the Presence of God, who had been promised when the camp was still pitched beneath the cliffs of Sinai.

Thinking much and deeply, Joshua wandered forth alone; and suddenly, **“as he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, there stood a man over against him, with his sword drawn in his hand.”**

We need those uplifted eyes. Too often we keep our gaze fixed on the ground, and miss the celestial visions that await us all round. But who was this man? Was he phantom or reality, Hebrew or Canaanite, friend or foe? Joshua knew not; but his heart was pure and clear, and therefore he did not hesitate to go up to Him and challenge him with the inquiry, **“Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?”**

Then came the majestic reply, **“Nay; but as Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come.”**

And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and took the place of lowly obedience, saying, **“What saith my Lord unto his servant?”**

We cannot doubt, then, who He was.

Though bearing the semblance of a man, he was certainly neither man nor angel. Had he been either, he would have instantly repelled the homage which Joshua gave. When the men of Lystra were about to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, they cried out in horror, **“Sirs, why do ye these things? we are men of like passions with you;”** and when John, amid the blaze of glory, fell down before the feet of the angel who lifted the concealing veil, he said, **“See thou do it not; for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets.”**

But when Joshua prostrated himself before this mysterious apparition, there was no prohibition to his lowly homage. It was accepted as Peter's in the fishing-boat; and as the leper's when he knelt at the blessed feet of Christ for healing. Joshua was even urged to more careful and reverent homage, in words which were addressed to Moses from the burning bush, where the I AM spake with him; and we have to believe that he who spake to Joshua on the threshold of Canaan was none other than The Lord, the God of Israel, whose delights, long before the incarnation, were with the sons of men, and who anticipated it by paying preliminary visits to our earth in corporeal form. The title here adopted by our Lord clings to Him throughout the Bible.

- Isaiah says that he is given to be the Leader and Commander of his people.
- Peter describes him as the Prince or Captain of Life.
- The Epistle to the Hebrews refers to Him as the Captain of our Salvation, who was made perfect through suffering.
- And at the close of the Book we see a majestic procession come forth from the opened Heaven, led by a Captain, who is clothed in vesture dipped in blood, and whose name is the Word of God.

I. THE SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS VISION TO JOSHUA

It has been generally supposed that this divine Captain came to take Joshua's place in command, and assume the supreme direction of the hosts of Israel; much as when the German Emperor takes the field, his greatest officers subordinate themselves to Him, surrendering to his hands the control of the campaign, and are content to execute his plans. But that is not the deepest meaning here.

“**The Lord's host**” does not primarily allude to those Israelite armies encamped beside the overflowing waters of the Jordan; but to other and invisible hosts, encamped all around on those heights, though no ear ever heard the call of the sentries at their posts of duty, or saw the sheen of their swords flashing in the sunlight, or beheld their marshaled ranks. Those troops of harnessed angels were the hosts of which this wondrous warrior was Captain.

There are several references in Scripture to the presence, near at hand, of angel-hosts.

When Jacob, after his angry altercation with Laban, was on his way back to Canaan, fearful perhaps of pursuit, we are told that the angels of God met him as though a squadron of heavenly armies suddenly came in sight assuring him of defense against attack.

When the servant of the prophet was dismayed to find himself encircled by the hosts of Syria, he was permitted, in answer to Elisha's prayer, to see that the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire.

The Psalmist tells of the angel that encampeth round about them that fear him, and of the hosts that do his bidding.

So in Gethsemane, the Lord referred to the twelve legions of angels who were waiting, under arms, for the least indication of the Father's will to come only too gladly to his relief.

It is therefore in harmony with the tenor of Scripture to see those lines of warriors waiting within the curtains of the unseen to be led against the foes of God and Israel. And we read a new meaning into the ancient phrase by which The Lord became known. “**Who is the King of glory?**” “**The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.**”

But if it be true that there are hosts of light, it is certainly true also that there are hosts of darkness. Such is the perpetual affirmation of Scripture. Behind the gods of the heathen inspiration detects demons, who rule men through the hideous idols of their hands. Behind the might of vast but ungodly empires inspired men descry the presence and activity of great potentates from Satan's fallen realm. Behind the darkness of this world the Bible teaches us to look for wicked spirits, who rule it from “**high places.**”

These they occupy for the present, and until the second advent hurls them down, first to the earth, and afterward to the abyss (I Corinthians 10:20; Daniel 10:13; Ephesians 6:12; Revelation 20:2, 3).

Is it, therefore, any cause for wonder that the walls of Jericho fell down, or that vast armies were scattered without a blow being struck, or that the land was subdued in a seven years campaign? These achievements were the earthly and visible results of victories won in the heavenly and spiritual sphere by armies which follow the Word of God upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and pure.

- Those walls fell down because smitten by the impact of celestial hosts.
- Those armies fled because the dark powers with which they were in league had been put to the rout before the Lord God of Sabaoth.
- That land was subdued because of some great dislodgment which had taken place in regions beyond human ken.

There was therefore deep significance in the words with which Caleb had sought to encourage his people forty years before: **“Their defense is removed from over them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not.”**

And we can better understand what the Lord meant when he said, **“As Captain of the Lord’s host am I now come.”**

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS VISION TO THE CHURCH

If we read the thoughts thus suggested into the story of the conquest of Canaan, we shall find it invested with fresh interest. It is, as we have said, not only an ancient historic record, but a page torn out of the chronicles of Heaven, telling of that mighty conflict which has been in process since the introduction of moral evil, and shall last till the Son of God has destroyed the works of the devil.

Throughout the world of nature there are signs of conflict and collision.

Everywhere armies meet in battleshock, and part to repair their losses or count their gains. According to the last findings of science, the invisible molecules of the calmest air are in rapid motion all around us, jostling with each other, and fighting hard to keep their course, but hindered by a thousand kindred molecules that are fighting too, so that we move and work in a very cyclone of whirling atoms. There is no pool, however tranquil; no forest-glade, however peaceful; no isle bathed by southern seas, and set gem-like on the breast of ocean, however enchanting; no scene, however fascinating which is not swept by opposing squadrons contending for victory. The swift pursue their prey; the strong devour the weak; the fittest alone survive in the terrific strife.

For the student of God’s ways all this leads up to a more tremendous struggle, between darkness and light, evil and good, Satan and our King.

And here is the real importance of the ascension, which was the worthy climax of the wonders of the first advent, as it will introduce the glories of the second.

All through his earthly ministry our Lord encountered the dark powers.

- They assailed him in the wilderness of temptation;
- They opposed him through the wretched victims they possessed;
- They gathered in their might in the glades of Gethsemane;
- They hissed their horrid suggestions into his heart on the Cross; and
- They resisted his every step as he arose.

Up to that moment none of woman born had proved himself able to overcome their attacks. But the life and death of the man Christ Jesus turned the tide. And when he arose and ascended far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come, it became established beyond a doubt that though man in himself was no match for hell, yet man in Christ, in union with the Son of God, was more than a conqueror; able to do all things through him that strengthened him, and destined to overcome.

The victory of the ascension was not for Jesus only, but for his people; that he might lead his heavenly squadrons forth to assured victory, whilst the Church militant marched on the plains of earth below.

When the Church won her mightiest victories over the idols of Greece and Rome, the systems of Pagan philosophy, the temples of Venus and Diana and Jove, she recognized this; and her successes were due, not to the valor or prowess of her battalions, but to the spiritual forces with which she was allied.

To this same cause, whether recognized or not, we must attribute the missionary triumphs of recent years the open doors; the tottering of heathen systems; the unopposed progress of the Gospel in many lands. These results have been doubtless simultaneous with changes in the sphere of the Unseen and Eternal, of which we can form no true conception; and the future conquests of the Church must depend, not on her wealth or numbers or prestige, but on her loving and hallowed alliance with those celestial hosts to which the Lord Jesus referred on the plains of Jericho when he said, "**As Captain of the Lord's host am I now come.**"

Alas, that this truth has been so little appreciated!

The Church of Christ has too often either considered that she contained within herself all the resources necessary for victory over the evil of the world, or she has stood paralyzed or aghast before the Jerichos of sin which have risen up to obstruct her path. The fenced cities of drink and lust, of self-indulgence or apathy, have refused to open their gates to her challenge, and have laughed defiance to her hosts. Then she has appealed to Caesar to human methods and alliances and expedients. But in vain; for notwithstanding all, the walls have not fallen down, nor her foes given back. The saints of God have need to repent of their sins and failures in this direction.

Let them realize that already the Captain of the celestial hosts has led his squadrons against their foes and his. Let them put away all that would imperil or impair the alliance. Let them raise a modification of the old battle-cry, which was originally based on an acknowledgment of this great spiritual fact, and charge with the shout, "**The sword of the Lord and of his people.**"

III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS VISION TO OURSELVES

We sometimes feel lonely and discouraged. The hosts with which we are accustomed to cooperate are resting quietly in their tents. No one seems able to enter into our anxieties and plans. Our Jerichos are so formidable - the neglected parish; the empty church; the hardened congregation; the godless household. How can we ever capture these, and hand them over to the Lord, like dismantled castles, for him to occupy?

That problem at first baffles us, and appears insoluble. Then we vow it shall be untied, and summon all our wit and energy to solve it. We study the methods of others, and copy them; deliver our best addresses and sermons; put forth herculean exertions; we adopt exciting advertisements and questionable methods, borrowed from the world.

Suppose Israel had taken lessons in scaling walls and taking fenced cities from the Canaanites! Or that the people had made an attack on Jericho with might and main, determined to find or make a breach! Such suppositions are not altogether absurd. At least they have their counterpart in the practice of too many of God's children, who forget that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, and that by strength shall no man prevail.

But in our hours of disappointment, when we have tried our best in vain, and have fallen as the sea-birds which dash themselves against the lighthouse tower fall to the foot with broken wing it is well to go forth alone, confessing our helplessness, and tarrying for the vision; for then we shall be likeliest to see the Captain of the Lord's host. He will undertake our cause; he will marshal his troops and win the day; he will fling the walls of Jericho to the ground.

Those walls can only fall down by faith; for faith allies itself with omnipotence, and becomes the channel along which the might of God can pass, as the electric current along the wire. Our cooperation may be employed, but only to walk around the walls, in the garb of priestly purity, and blowing the rams horns.

But we must be holy.

“Put off thy shoes from off thy feet,” said the divine Warrior to Moses; **“for the place whereon thou standest is holy.”**

Wherever God is, there is holiness. Even Canaan is holy when God stands upon its soil. And we must be holy if we would cooperate with him. We must put off the old man, with his affections and lusts; we must cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; we must cast off the works of darkness, and array ourselves in the panoply of light.

We know enough to be sure that he will not ally himself with the unfaithful or unclean, or have any association with us so long as we harbor an Achan with wedge of gold and Babylonish garment. And if he is to go forth with our armies, to deliver us and to give up our enemies before us, we must be careful that the camp be holy, and that he see no unclean thing in us and turn away (Deuteronomy 23:14).

The battle is not to the strong, nor the race to the swift; but each to those who are living lives separate from the world, and dedicated to God. The vessels which are meet for the Master's use are pure ones. Cleanness, rather than cleverness, is the prime condition of successful service. And then it is only out of such a heart that the faith can spring which is able to wield the forces of the unseen and spiritual and divine.

May there be no film between God's holiness and ours! Nothing to insulate us or shut off the current! No shoe-leather to intercept the communication of its fullness to our need.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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