

Living Messages of the Books of The Bible

GENESIS TO MALACHI

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CHAPTER SIX

THE MESSAGE OF JOSHUA

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B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. "The Lord is a Man of War"

The Foe of Sin to-day as ever.
Personal.
Social.
Civic.
National.

II. "The Just shall live by Faith"

Personally.
Relatively.

To exercise righteous influence, and produce the result of righteous conditions, faith is necessary.

THE second division of the Hebrew Scriptures, designated The Prophets, fell into two sections.

The first was called The Earlier Prophets, and comprised Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings.

In some arrangements the book of Ruth was included with that of Joshua. In others it was counted as one of the five rolls constituting the Hagiographa, or book of Psalms. The placing of the historical books of the Old Testament in the division known as the Prophets indicated the fact that they were considered to be prophetic in the full sense of the word. History is prophetic in that it has a teaching value. To read from the true standpoint is to observe the method of God, and to learn the principles of human life.

The book of Joshua is a link between the death of Moses and the death of Joshua, and covers a period of from forty-five to fifty years in the history of the ancient people. Joshua was born in slavery, and the first years of his life were spent in the midst of the hard and terrible conditions in which his people lived in Egypt. He was about forty years of age at the time of the exodus and was one of the minority who brought the true report of the land, when the spies were sent forth.

The book bearing his name tells the story of the coming of the chosen people into the land and their settlement therein.

In order to the discovery of its permanent values, we must again presuppose acquaintance with its content, and proceed to enquire what are the impressions which as a whole it makes upon the mind. It is a book crowded with incident, and there are general impressions inevitably resulting from its study which I propose to indicate by two quotations, one taken from an earlier book, and the other from a later one.

The first is from the song the Israelites sang on the borders of the Red Sea, after they had crossed, "**The Lord is a Man of war.**" The other is from the prophecy of Habakkuk, "**The just shall live by his faith.**"

In the song sung upon the banks of the Red Sea by the delivered people, there emerges into definite statement a great truth, never lost sight of through the whole Bible, "**The Lord is a Man of war.**"

In the prophecy of Habakkuk, the truth which emerged as a principle in Genesis is crystallized into a definite statement. The permanent values of the book of Joshua, then, are that it illustrates these two truths, thus impressing them upon the mind, and revealing the intimate relationship between them.

Let us take the first of these statements and examine it carefully.

This book is criticized by those who declare that its teaching concerning the attitude of Joshua, and the activity of the people under his command, are out of harmony with the truth concerning God revealed by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is hardly necessary for me to say that I join issue with that conclusion altogether. I hold, on the contrary, that this book, rightly read, interprets the meaning of that side of truth concerning the Lord which we sometimes find it difficult to understand.

Let it first be recognized that this conception of God runs through the whole Bible.

It emerges into clear statement in the song after the crossing of the Red Sea. It is manifest in all the history of the Hebrew people, as written for us in this book, and in the book of Judges, in I and II Samuel, in I and II Kings, and in that priestly repetition of the story of the Kings which we have in I and II Chronicles. The people were commanded to battle, led in battle, punished in battle, under the direct government of God. This conception of God is celebrated by the Old Testament writers.

One supreme instance is found in that matchless twenty-fourth Psalm,

**“The Lord strong and mighty,
the Lord mighty in battle.”**

It was held, moreover, by the prophet Isaiah, who declared, **“By fire will the Lord plead, and by His sword, with all flesh.”** The thought runs through the new Testament in spiritual fervor, though material forms of expression are absent. The underlying fact is manifested in the anger of Jesus, and suggested in the phrase **“the wrath of God.”**

The same conception obtains in the last book of the Bible, when material symbolism and spiritual truth so wonderfully merge in the passage, **“I saw the heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He that sat thereon, called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He doth judge and make war. And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems; and He hath a name written, which no one knoweth but He Himself. And He is arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood; and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and pure. And out of His mouth proceedeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations: and He shall rule them with a rod of iron: and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God.”**

This conception of God as a warlike One, a God of battles, capable of anger, moving forth ever and anon in definite punishment by the sword, runs through all the Bible. It has been questioned and criticized, always through partial, and consequently false views of God. It is affirmed that this conception of God is out of harmony with the truth declared emphatically by the revelation of Jesus Christ, and in the words **“God is love.”**

I affirm, on the contrary, that if this conception be inaccurate, if in certain given circumstances, and in the presence of certain conditions, God is not a God of war, then He cannot be a God of love. All the references to Him as a God of war in the Bible, and all the activities attributed to Him, spring from one simple fountainhead; and that is the eternal and undying love of His heart. In this book of Joshua that supreme fact is clearly manifest and explained.

God is perpetually at war with sin.

That is the whole explanation of the extermination of the Canaanites. The story of that extermination must be read in connection with the things chronicled in previous books, and in the light of the actual facts as to the condition of the people in Canaan.

In a vision recorded in Genesis, Abraham was told of the captivity of his descendants, and that they should suffer hardship in a strange land for four hundred years, and then be brought back into the land to possess it. In the course of that declaration it was said, **“The iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full.”**

In that incidental word we have the key to the situation. The people who dwelt in Canaan, when Joshua led God’s people in, had filled to the full the cup of iniquity. Their corruption is revealed in Leviticus, in the warnings uttered to the Hebrews against the evil things they would find in the land; **“Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out from before you: and the land is defiled: therefore do I visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land vomiteth out her inhabitants.”** And again, in a parenthesis which flashes its light upon the whole story, (**“For all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled”**).

These are distinct declarations of God, that the people were to be exterminated because of the evils existing in the land.

There was absolute immorality and atrocious cruelty. The Assyrian records, which have comparatively recently been brought to light, reveal the condition of Phoenicia. The whole truth concerning the purging of the land by the Hebrew people under the command of God is stated by Dr. Moorhead thus, “It was terrible surgery this; but it was surgery and not murder - the excision of the cancer that the healthy part might remain.” That exactly explains what happened when the Hebrew people dispossessed the corrupt peoples who occupied the land of Canaan.

Then it must be remembered that this was not done until after long probation.

The land had not been without definite teaching and warning. Melchizedek had lived in Canaan, king of righteousness and king of Salem. Abraham had dwelt there. Solemn warning had been given in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the fame of which had spread through the length and breadth of the land. Blind to the light, deaf to the voice, these people had persisted in sin, until they had become absolutely immoral and atrociously cruel; and for the sake of succeeding generations and the surrounding nations, it was necessary to excise the cancer, and give the opportunity of healthy life.

God is seen in this book of Joshua as a warlike One proceeding to battle, not for a capricious purpose, not for the enlargement of territory, for the whole earth is His; but in order to change and end the corrupt condition of affairs in the larger interests of the oncoming centuries, and of the whole human race. It was a conflict as between truth and liberty on the one hand, and lying and licentiousness on the other. One or the other had to go down in the struggle, and God moved forward as a warlike One, using these people as His scourge to purify the land, and to plant in that little strip of country a people who, whatever their faults were, should yet become the depository of the truth which should at last permeate the world, and give men everywhere the opportunity for life, which it was necessary they should have. Moreover, it must be observed that God was not merely clearing a land in order to find a home for people upon whom He had set His heart.

Solemn warnings were given to the Israelites perpetually by word and by deed, that if they turned to the sins of the people they had exterminated, they in their turn should be cast out. That is precisely what happened. They did turn, in spite of the law, in spite of the leading of God, to the abominations which they found in the land, failed to bear the testimony which they were created to bear, and consequently to-day are a people “**scattered and peeled.**”

God was as surely against Israel as against Canaan when, in the person of one member of the nation, she turned with lusting eyes to the things of evil. That solemn halt and awful defeat at Ai teach the lesson of the meaning of God’s warlike nature as surely as did the stories of the sweeping out of the men who were already in the land.

As a matter of fact, the dealing of God with His own is almost severer than His dealing with the Canaanites.

One man had coveted a Babylonish garment and a wedge of gold, had grasped something of the spoil for the enrichment of himself, and had hidden it in his tent; and the whole march of Israelites was halted by defeat; and until the evil thing was found and destroyed, and the sinning man had expiated his offense by the very death that the Hebrew people were inflicting upon the sinners of the land, there could be no going forward.

God is the terrible foe of sin, refusing to make truce with it, after probation and long patience visiting in judgment corrupt peoples, and punishing with severity the very instrument raised up for the carrying out of His work, whenever it becomes contaminated by sin. God’s rule is ever the expression of His righteousness, impelled by love. Supposing these people had been allowed to remain and retain their power; supposing there had never been brought into existence the people who were to receive the oracles of revelation, what would have been the history of the world by now? By that very purging, by those drastic measures of wrath against iniquity persisted in after long probation, God gave the race its new opportunity, as He prepared the way for the coming of the One in whom His love was to be incarnate, and His anger to be most perfectly manifest.

God used as His instruments men so far as they were loyal to Him. He also pressed into service the forces of the universe, in so far as they were necessary for the carrying out of His purpose; the restraint of a river while His hosts crossed over, the trembling of the earth until the walls of the city fell, the lengthening of the day until the battle was won. It may be said that God does not to-day divide rivers, or cause mountains to tremble, or stay the sun in his going. These interventions were but representative of a method. God does not repeat Himself unless there be absolute necessity for it. Yet who shall say that the earthquake is not still His minister, the lightning His sword, and the hurricane His chariot. Is it not possible that, if we had the illuminated eye, we should discover that the things we describe as catastrophes are but evidences of the goings of God in supernatural strength, for the accomplishment of some far-off purpose upon which His heart of love is set?

Once more, notice the methods which are remarkable in relation to these people.

Notice the peculiar restraint of the natural force of His appointed soldiers, within the bounds of

His government. Is it possible to conceive of anything much more foolish than attempting to take a city by the blowing of rams' horns and the marching of men? Yet that is not the way to state the case. Let us rather enquire whether it is possible to conceive of anything more heroic than the ability to walk seven days round a city, without striking a blow, after having won a battle by the sword on the other side of Jordan? I cannot laugh at the story as being unlikely. I am rather amazed at the picture of the restrained soldiers of God, content to do His bidding, while leaving to Him the issues.

When at last the walls trembled, no one imagined that the blast of the rams' horns had shaken them, no one imagined that the tramp of feet round them had made them tremble. They knew, and we know, that these men were being taught that God operates for the accomplishment of His purposes through the obedient and heroic faith of men who will obey Him, however foolhardy their action may appear in the eyes of men.

The restraint of the lust of a conquering army is equally remarkable.

Compare the Assyrian records, to which we have already made reference, and see what the men of that very district did in the day of victory, how they treated their captives. The contrast is almost startling.

“The Lord is a Man of war.”

- His purpose is righteous.
- His instruments are controlled by righteousness.
- His methods are righteous.

I see Him in this book of Joshua moving in resistless fury against sin, in the interests of the nations, of the race at large, and of the unborn centuries, in order that truth might have its opportunity in the world, in the interests of man.

The other truth that **“the just shall live by his faith”** has become patent by this statement of the first permanent value of the book.

This truth emerged in Genesis, was expressed in clear statement by Habakkuk, and enforced by threefold citation in the apostolic writings. The declaration means that the power of the righteous life is faith. It is by faith in God that the righteous lives. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews has this passage **“the just shall live by his faith”** - that is, he shall live the righteous life, by faith. The power of righteousness is faith.

The book of Joshua is a remarkable interpretation of this fact, and it is especially valuable to notice the interpretation of faith which this book offers.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews declares **“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down,”** and that statement touches the keystone of the victories of Joshua. The first strategic battle was won at Jericho. Beyond that, the whole land stretched out before them.

This being granted, carefully observe what this history of the conquest of the land teaches concerning faith:

- Faith is the acceptance of God's standard of holiness.
- Faith is abandonment to the government of God's will.
- Faith is achievement in the strength of God's might.

It is first acceptance of God's standard of holiness. In the first words of Joshua addressed to these people, he warned them of the perils which awaited them in the land to which they came, and charged them that they must be pure and strong. In his last discourse the same passionate abandonment to the standard of God's holiness is manifest. That is faith. Faith is not an attitude which asks for mercy, and professes to receive it, while careless about holiness. Faith finds the grip of its anchorage in the holiness of God. That is the underlying secret of the strength and victories of Joshua.

Faith is also abandonment to the government of God's will. We have already referred to this, as revealed in the story of the taking of Jericho. The men who were content to do such things as they did were men of faith. In the stirring days of the evangelical revival, when the Wesleys and Whitefields were passing like flames of fire through the country, they sang:

“Fools and madmen let us be,
Yet is our sure trust in Thee.”

That is faith; to be willing to do things at which the wisdom of the world scoffs, if God command. In that way God's victories are won, and in no other.

Faith finally, therefore, is achievement in the strength of God's might. All the victories of righteousness through the centuries testify to this fact.

The permanent values of the book of Joshua constitute its living message, and therefore I need but repeat them in a few final sentences.

To-day “**The Lord is a Man of war.**”

At this hour He is the foe of sin in personal, social, civic, and national life. At this moment, in this individual life of mine and in the world at large, He is moving forward in unabated, undeviating, unceasing hostility to sin. Blessed be His name!

Thank God that He will not make peace with sin in my heart. How I have tried to evade some issue with Him, to plead the excuse, “**The fathers have eaten sour grapes. and the children's teeth are set on edge**”; to urge the difficulty of the circumstances in which I am; to plead my infirmity. All the while God is a Man of war, smiting sin, refusing to make truce with it, accepting no white flag of surrender offered to Him, except that of the abandonment of sin, and all because He loves me.

The moment you can persuade me that God Almighty will excuse sin in my life, I cease to

believe in His love. He is the foe of sin in me, in London, in England, in the world.

If in these days His methods are not exactly the methods of the past, let it never be forgotten that even to-day every army that marches is under His control; that He girds Cyrus outside the covenant as surely now as in the days of old. I bless His name for the thunder of His authority, and for the profound conviction that He is fierce and furious in His anger against sin, wherever it manifests itself.

To-day also, as in the ancient days, “**the just shall live by his faith.**”

Personally that is true. If a man is to have the victory of the righteous life he must win it by faith, by accepting God’s standard of holiness, by abandoning the life to the government of God’s will. Then and then only, will he achieve victory in God’s power.

It is equally true relatively. To exercise a righteous influence, and to produce the result of righteous conditions, we must have faith in God. Blot God out of your propaganda, refuse to have His name and the name of His Christ mentioned, when you gather together to discuss the amelioration of social conditions, and confusion is written across your assembly. It is only as God is recognized in His holiness, and obeyed in His law, that righteous conditions can obtain in personal, or social, or national life.

May we hear the message, and answer it with all our hearts to the glory of His name.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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