

# Joshua

And  
The Land of Promise

by

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### TAKE HEED TO LOVE!

(Joshua 23)

“With all thy hart, with all thy soul and mind,  
Thou must him love, and his behests embrace; . . .  
And give thyselfe unto him full and free,  
That full and freely gave himselfe to thee!”  
- Spenser

EIGHTEEN years had probably passed since the events recorded in the previous chapter. The rest which God had given had not been broken in upon by any uprising of the Canaanites; and the people had been able to prosecute the toils of husbandry unhindered by the alarm of war. All around them, and mingled with them, were the remnants of the Canaanites; but they were becoming more accustomed to the joint occupancy of the land with the invaders, and were content to share with them a country so rich that it was easily able to sustain them all.

Meanwhile, years as they passed left evident traces on the bearing and energy of the great leader, who had become “**old, and well stricken in years.**” In this respect, of course, he presents no parallel with the Prince and Captain of the Church, who is leading his people into the heavenly places, and sharing with them his rest. He “**ever liveth.**” Joshua, knowing that his end was drawing near, called for the leaders of the people to an audience with him; in some such way as the great Apostle of the Gentiles summoned the elders of Ephesus to meet him on the shore of the AEgean. It must have been an imposing and memorable gathering, either in the vicinity of his own inheritance, or on the sacred site of Shiloh.

Probably Caleb would be there with Kenaz; Phinehas the priest; warriors who had been in all the great battles of the conquest, but who had latterly exchanged the sword for the plowshare, and the spear for the pruning-hook; others also who were beardless youths at the conquest, but now came as heads of families, elders, judges, and officers. The wisdom and chivalry of Israel were convoked to hear the last words of the great chief, who bridged the gulf of time between the passage of the Red Sea and that moment when the Land of Promise had been for twenty years in the possession of the people.

Standing upon the vantage ground of that gathering, Joshua directed the mind of his auditors into the past, and reminded them of what God had done for them. He had brought them in and planted them in the mountain of his inheritance, in the place which he had made for himself to dwell in; and not one thing had failed of all the good things that he had spoken; all had come to pass. This episode of the old veteran testifying to the unfailing faithfulness of God has its counterpart in the experience of the matured believer, when memory speaks, recalling scenes from the long past, and comparing the harvest of life's golden autumn with the promise of its spring.

Joshua's one anxiety appears to have been about the nations that were left. Seven times he refers to the nations of the land. What God had done to them; how they were allotted to be an inheritance; how God was prepared to thrust them out; and especially how great a temptation would be suggested by their perpetual presence, lest the people should be tempted to cleave unto them, intermarry with them, and adopt their gods. It was as though the old man realized that he was the only barrier between Israel and the inroads of worldly conformity and idolatrous rites; and his exhortation anticipates that addressed by the apostle Paul to the elders of the church at Ephesus:

**“I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock, and from among your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things; wherefore watch ye!”**

As a preservative against these evil consequences, Joshua proposed three safeguards.

The first of which reminds us of the admonition given to himself at the beginning of this book, that they were to be very courageous, so as to keep and do all that was written in the law of Moses, not turning aside from it to the right hand or to the left.

The second was the certainty that if they became identified with the heathen in marriage alliance or idolatrous practices, they would not be able to prevail against them in battle, but would find in them a trap, a scourge and thorns, until they perished quickly from off the good land into which they had come.

But it is on the third that we would dwell particularly; **“take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the Lord your God.”**

There is a beautiful fitness in this exhortation as coming at the close of this Book. The earlier pages are full of bloodshed and strife; but here the soldier speaks as the lover, and the clash of arms is exchanged for the dulcet notes of the harp. The froth is left behind, and the stream runs clear. The storm of the morning has sunk into the gentle zephyr of the evening sunset. Thus the life of Christ led up to the discourses of the upper room, warm with the glow of love. The whole law of God and of human life is fulfilled in that one word, **“Thou shalt love.”**

Take good heed to love God, and all other injunctions are comparatively needless.

- Love God, and you will be content with nothing less than to inherit all the land, even to that great sea of his love upon which the sun never goes down.

- Love God, and courage must possess you; as the timid bird will assail the dreaded depredator of her nest, her maternal love making her oblivious to all considerations of her own safety.
- Love God, and you will love his Book, nor wish to swerve from it.
- Love God, and you will not seek a love which is inconsistent with your supreme affection.
- Love God, and you will possess God, and be possessed by God; and things which otherwise had been snares and traps and scourges will become stepping-stones to a fuller, richer life.
- Love God, and you will become one with all holy beings in Heaven and upon earth, and throughout the universe, to whom he is the supreme Love.

The one consideration, therefore, which demands our thought is how to fulfill this command, **“Take heed to love.”** What are the steps by which we may enter into the heart of obedience to that great law, first enunciated by Moses, and reaffirmed by Jesus, **“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength”**?

## **I. REMEMBER THAT LOVE IS OF God**

The only Being that really is, is God. All other being is derived; His is inherent and essential to Himself. There is probably a deeper meaning than we have ever apprehended in his name, I AM. There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things. He is over all, and through all, and in all. Therefore, all love and power and wisdom not only reside in him, but pass from him into all other beings, according to the measure in which they are prepared to receive them. He is the central Sun; and all that is fair or noble or helpful in any one is the far-traveled ray of his nature caught by the soul, consciously or not, to be flashed back again to its source.

What was nature in its first creation but the reproduction in material forms of thoughts and conceptions that otherwise had been hidden forever in the depths of the divine nature! What are the forces in the physical world, light, heat, electricity, but manifestations of the energy of God! And what, in the moral world, are virtue, courage, patience, love but sparks more or less dimmed by the fallen state of man of that light which lighteth every man coming into the world!

Let us ascend farther, into the highest sphere of all, and speak of love. Love is the crown of human nature; its regal chaplet of flowers; the bond by which the sentient universe is made one; the trait in which we most nearly resemble God, for God is Love. In Love's hand lies the key to unlock the lost secret of concord. She alone can speak the magic word by which the marring effect of sin can be undone, and all the occupants of the many mansions of the Father's house formed into one great family, bound together and to God by the cohesion of a common tie. It is by love alone that angels, and redeemed spirits, and holy beings everywhere shall be so harmonized as to unite in the new song, which is yet to break in waves of melody around the throne of the Most High. Love must conquer discord, subdue strife, and complete the divine purpose. But all love, whether in the heart of the babe, that stretches out its hands toward the familiar face which overbends it; or in the mother, enthralled to a new ecstasy; or in the faithful servant, prepared to give his life for his charge; whether in the soul of man or of angel; whether on earth, or beyond it in the blessed spheres that elude our vision - must have its ultimate source, fountain, and origin in the heart of God.

It stands, therefore, to reason that those who would love purely, unselfishly, strongly, must converse deeply with God. There must be a steeping of the nature in his fellowship, as the dyer's hand in the deep colors of his craft, or sea-flowers in the warm waters of southern climes. As the moon must hold converse with the sun, that she may receive the glory which she shall transmit to our night, so our only hope of giving love is to receive it.

We must get, if we would give; absorb, if we would transmit; obtain, if we would scatter. Oh for a closer walk with God!

## **II. BUT SUCH LOVE COMES TO US THROUGH Jesus**

There is, of Course, a broad sense in which the love of God reaches all men; but even this is only possible because of the death and intercession of the Lord Jesus. Unless he had become the propitiation for the sins of the world, the love of God would have had no channel through which, consistently with righteousness, it could have poured forth its tides. Had it not been for Jesus, the flowers of Heaven falling into the pit of sin would have been turned to flakes of fire.

But, in a deeper sense, the love of God has been stored in the manhood of Jesus.

The divine essence expresses itself in terms of human affection. And it is when we know Jesus, and are united to him by faith, and through him are united to God, that we begin to experience the full tide of divine love as it comes from God the Father, through the Son, to become in us a well of living water, springing up into everlasting life. Then we begin to experience what Paul meant when he cried, "**The love of Christ constraineth us.**"

Open your heart to Jesus; cultivate his friendship; live in his fellowship; familiarize yourself with the constant consideration of what he has done for you. Love begets love; think, then, how much he loved you, when he gave himself for you. Talk of him to others, till your soul begins to glow.

## **III. LOVE ALSO IS BY THE Holy Ghost**

The love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us (Romans 5:5). As the grapes of Eshcol were a pledge that God would give the land from which they came, and he did, so the divine Spirit takes of the love of Christ, and communicates it to us, as an assurance of a hope that can never be ashamed. We argue from the bliss which is to that which is to be. We are sure of eternity because it is already begun in us. Already we hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; and are therefore assured of the land where the Lamb leads his flock to fountains of life.

Let us lay this well to heart, that the first fruit of the Spirit is love. Like fruit, it swells gradually on the bough, reddens in the cluster, and ripens, man hardly knows how. Yield to the Holy Spirit; never rest till you have claimed, reverently and humbly, your share in Pentecost; be filled with the Spirit: thus you, too, will receive a baptism of love. When we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit in the inner man, we begin to know the heights and depths, and lengths and breadths of the love of Christ.

#### IV. THERE ARE SOME FURTHER DIRECTIONS FOR LOVING God

We can only enumerate them as we close:

- (1) Distinguish between the emotion of love, which is variable and inconstant, and love itself.
- (2) Remember that it is possible to love God not only with the heart, but with the mind. The will should put him first, as the pivot upon which the whole life shall revolve.
- (3) The test of love is not feeling or speaking, but obeying. **“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.”**
- (4) Guard against the intrusion of sense; for where any license is given to bodily appetite, there is instant loss inflicted on the growth of the soul in the love of God.
- (5) Climb to the love of God through the love of man.

Dare to treat all men as you know you would if yourself *felt* to love them, and you will come to feel tenderly and pitifully toward them. This is the beginning of love. This is most like God’s love. Act thus always by the power of the indwelling Spirit, and you will certainly apprehend in growing measure, though never comprehend, the unsearchable love of God. We may know the love of Christ; but it passeth knowledge.

~ end of chapter 21 ~

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