

BENJI SWINBURNSON

Meditations on Joshua

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## Foreword

This book is a part of a larger project that is a work in progress. My goal is to provide meditations or studies on the whole Bible that are Christ-centered, theologically rich, and accessible to the average adult or young adult layperson. As of the writing of the foreword I have completed meditations on Genesis through 1 Samuel in the Old Testament, and the four Gospels in the New Testament.

I did not make direct use of commentaries or other study helps in writing these meditations. This makes attributing the thoughts and ideas I have gleaned from others difficult to trace. I must mention James T. Dennison taught through Joshua in his “Historical Books” class while I was a student at Northwest Theological Seminary. What follows is not a repetition of what he covered, but is certainly influenced by his approach and method.

My interpretive approach goes by the name “redemptive-historical.” It seeks to follow this method in the tradition of Geerhardus Vos. With this method the Bible is viewed as a unified revelation of God. It progressively unfolds during the course of history. It’s development is rightly seen as “organic” in character. Just a seed grows into a bud, then a plant, and finally a full flow, so also the revelation of God and his kingdom grows

through history. Everything in the final flower is contained in the seed. Although clear change and development can be traced during the growth process, each stage is directly connected to what comes before and follows after. This ensures a substantial unity to the message of revelation.

It also means that the older revelation is preparatory for later revelation. The entire OT is organically connected to the fulness of the revelation of God's mystery, which is Christ and his kingdom. Contrary to many misunderstanding of the redemptive-historical approach, this does not mean that we focus solely on Christ's work for us in the accomplishment of redemptive. The fact that revelation is historical means that it is inherently adapted to the practical needs of God's people throughout history. The Bible is not a systematic theology textbook which abstracts propositional truths about God, Christ, man, the church, or other subjects. Such truths can be found throughout the Bible. Such a textbook is highly necessary and useful for Christians to better know God. But God did not chose to reveal himself in this form. Revelation comes in the form of narratives, letters, poetry, and other genres that already adapts God's revelation to the needs of the people.

Our most basic need is regeneration and the forgiveness of sins. For us this manifests itself in the constant exercise of faith and repentance. We maintain and grow in these gifts in communion with God through words: God's word to us in the Scriptures, and our words to God expressed through worship and prayer.

When we read the Scriptures, we have that which God has given to be an external means to link us directly to the divine grace

and power that is in Christ Jesus. This was held forth to God's Old Testament people in various types, shadows, promises, and prophecies. When we read its pages, the same Christ is set before us, in whom we must put our trust and to whom we must bow the knee.

Any true "meditation" on God's word must approach the exercise with this aim. We read the Scriptures not in impress ourselves with our ability to comprehend and know God's wisdom, but to draw near to Christ who alone has power and grace to forgive of our sins.

It is my hope that these meditations will prove useful to individuals, families, and study groups as they seek to know Christ and the Triune God more deeply.





# 1

## Chapter 1

### #1 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 1:1-18

The book of Joshua marks an era of transition. The nation of Israel moves from an era of wandering to an age of conquest. One generation lived in defeat, but a new generation will be granted victory. Their circumstances may change, but God's promises do not. Seasons of suffering will be tempered by times of triumph and glory. God's judgment for sin is real. His anger lasts for a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime. Moses's Psalm asks the Lord to "make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us" (Ps. 90:15). His prayer is answered in this era of conquest.

The book has Joshua as its main human character. As God was with Moses, so he will be with Joshua. When we see Joshua we see the Lord who is with him and fights for him. He is a figure we have seen before. He is closely linked to Moses. The baton of leadership is clearly passed from the one to the other. In Exodus 17, Moses appointed Joshua to fight against Amalek

while Moses kept his hands held high on the hill. In Exodus 24:13 Joshua served as Moses's assistant and accompanied him on the mountain of God (cf. Num. 11:28). Joshua was also among the faithful few when the twelve were sent to spy out the land of Canaan and brought a good report to the people (Num. 13:16). He was among the handful of those with true faith who survived the wilderness wanderings and lived to see the promised land (Num. 26:65). Moses had already laid hands on him and commissioned him as a Spirit-endowed servant of the LORD. He was invested with the same authority as Moses and commissioned as the leader and shepherd of Israel (Num. 27).

Moses had given Joshua a charge that may sound familiar after reading this chapter: "Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them" (Deut. 31:7, 23). The fact that he was filled with the Spirit of power and wisdom made clear that any shepherding power he possessed was from God and not from himself.

In Joshua 1 these promises are reiterated and strongly emphasized. The exhortation to be "strong and courageous" is repeated three times: once at the beginning and twice at the end. In this way, it functions as a literary "inclusio" for the passage.

This does not mean that everything they give themselves to will automatically succeed simply because Joshua is doing it. Joshua was an imperfect leader just as Moses was. The promise of success is directly tied to the word of God. That is why Joshua

is told that he must be careful to walk according to the Book of the Law. He shall meditate on it day and night. Insofar as Joshua and the church remain faithful to God's word, they will have only victory and success.

This is a key point to remember. Too often the Book of Joshua is hijacked to cheer-lead what really amounts to an "earthly triumphalism" in the church. This phrase refers to the misguided notion that if Christians were just brave and bold enough, they would be able to make the world a better place. The triumphalist often argues that the reason the church is "failing" to change the culture is because of a lack of bold faith that engages the world. If the church would just "try harder" it would meet with the earthly success God (allegedly) promises.

World-engagement is certainly commendable and necessary for a Christian to live out his or her calling faithfully before Christ. But the word of God teaches us that we must temper our earthly expectations for success in this present time. The path of Christ that we walk is one in which we carry a cross. This is an age of battle. Although we have the promise of ultimate victory in the world to come, the present time will be filled with temporary failures and defeats. Even Israel will be defeated at Ai due to the sin of Achan. Ultimately the book of Joshua will give way to the book of Judges. That book will chronicle Israel's continual compromise with the world and their slow devolution into a culture in which "every man does what is right with his own eyes."

Our strength and courage must therefore be focused on the teaching of the word of God and the ultimate victory promised

to us in heaven.

The fact that this will involve failures in this life does not make God's promise void. It remains true for us in Christ. That is why it is so significant that God will be "with" Joshua. Three times this promise is repeated concerning Joshua: Just as God was with Moses, so he will be with Joshua (1:5); Do not be frightened, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go (1:9); May the LORD be with you, as he was with Moses (1:17).

In the fullness of time, God would make good on this promise. Another Joshua would appear whom we know as "Jesus." At his birth, we were reminded that his name is Emmanuel or "God-with-us." Like Joshua, his power came from the Spirit. Only upon Jesus, it was poured out without measure. He came to fight our true enemy—the devil. In him, victory came through the defeat of the cross. In his resurrection, he made conquest of the spiritual forces of darkness and opened the way to the Paradise of God.

Just like Joshua, in his departure, he left his people with a command and a promise. The command was to make disciples of the nations by baptizing and teaching the word of God. And he promised that as the church remained faithful to this work he would be with them always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).

Jesus Christ rules the nations. The era in which we live is an era of suffering and tribulation, even as it is an era of conquest. Through the power of the cross and the Spirit of God, we have

## CHAPTER 1

the promise of certain suffering in this world, but also final victory over the forces of evil. In him, we can truly be strong and courageous, for we know he is with us wherever we go.

## Chapter 2

### #2 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 2:1-24

Israel's strength and victory will be found in God alone. This was the clear message of Joshua 1. Moses and Joshua are great men of God. Although there is a clear line of succession between them, Israel's hope must not lie in either man but in the Spirit that dwelt in both of them. Both men were servants who testified to the Son of God. Whose power was at work in them ahead of time to foreshadow his person and work. They were servants in God's house. But Jesus is the Son who is Lord over all (see Heb. 3:1-6, 4:9).

God had promised to be with Joshua. His presence would be the source of their strength and courage. This power would be channeled to them through the word of God, upon which they were to meditate day and night (Josh. 1:7-8). But this did not mean that these blessings "automatically" came to the people. The promises on God's part required faith on the part of the people. Through the promises of his word, God holds out the

gift of victory and glory. On our part, we must respond with true faith to receive this gift and make it our own.

This latter point is made clear in Joshua chapter 2 and the story of Rahab hiding the spies. Hebrews 11:31 states that it was “by faith” that Rahab hid them and did not perish with the city of Jericho. In her faith, she mirrored Joshua’s earlier experience when he spied out the land for Israel in the days of Moses (Num. 13). Just as he did not fear the might of the nations and trusted in God’s power, so also did Rahab. Joshua’s faith is thus mirrored in the Gentile Rahab.

It is easy to get caught up in the ethical dilemma this passage presents us with regarding Rahab’s “truthfulness” in her answer to the representatives of the king. My own view is that when civil authorities so abuse their authority to persecute and harm those directly appointed as the servants of God, we are not obligated to disclose the location of those who are under such threats. When a murderer is pursuing a victim, we are within our lawful rights to misdirect them in order to preserve the life of those under threat. We see a similar pattern in the life of David when Saul seeks to kill him. A civil leader (i.e. Saul) who is abusing his power unlawfully can be rightly resisted for the greater good of preserving innocent life.

Instead, what should stand out to us is how Rahab’s faith brought her salvation despite of her sinful condition. Rahab was, after all, a prostitute. She had no merit in her that would commend her as an Israelite. Her vocation was not only a violation of the moral law, it was specifically forbidden under the ceremonial law and would render a person “unclean.” Yet it

is through this unclean sinner that life and salvation came for the spies. By God's grace, life and salvation came also to her.

Likewise, we must not neglect to note her status as a foreigner to Israel. She is a member of the city of Jericho that is about to come under God's judgment. Morally speaking, there is no difference between her and the rest of the pagan citizens of the city. But the fact that she does not descend from Abraham is not the deciding factor in her fate.

The fact that she is female is also no barrier whatsoever to her fellowship with the God of Israel. Ironically, her status as the "weaker vessel" only highlights the power of God in her through faith. The mighty fighting men of Israel are helpless in the scene, sure to come to destruction without the help of this woman, Rahab. God's power is evident not in our natural strength, but in human weakness.

Justification and salvation are not by works, but by faith. Abraham himself believed in God prior to his circumcision. He is the father of all who believe, whether from among the Jews or the Gentiles.

Rahab has true faith in the God of Abraham: "I know that the LORD has given you the land...For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites...for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath" (Josh. 2:10-12). By this confession, she declared with her mouth what she believed in her heart—that the LORD is the one true God over all the



nations.

There is great irony in Rahab's statement. The Israelites saw God's mighty wonders in Egypt, yet the vast majority did not believe. Rahab only heard of what God had done in the deliverance of Egypt, and she trembled in fear at the power of the Most High. Faith stands in contrast to sight. It takes its power not from what is seen but from the word of God that is heard.

God's promises for victory and conquest do not depend on bloodlines or human associations. Our right standing before God is not guaranteed by the fact that we have great Christian forebears or friends. Likewise, our sinful past does not automatically disqualify us from participating in the life and salvation of God.

In the Gospel, these principles are fully revealed. God sent his son not to save the righteous but sinners and to call them to repentance. It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. The Gospel holds out the promise of deliverance from the certain destruction of all mankind in the judgment of God. The only thing that makes a difference between those who are saved and those who are destroyed is faith. Do we trust him? Do we humble ourselves before God? Are we willing to come before him and simply pray: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner!?"

To be sure, this faith must prove its sincerity through good works, as it did in Rahab (see James 2). But true faith has its focus not on our power or ability, but the power and ability of God. In Christ, we have one greater than Joshua. Jesus's

works of conquest far surpass those of his predecessor. For he has conquered the devil and all the forces of darkness. He has caused us to take possession of the promised land of heaven above. It is ours simply to receive this gift with a humble heart while we confess our defilement and unworthiness. By humbling ourselves, we make ourselves weak before him so that his all-surpassing power might be revealed in us.

# 3

## Chapter 3

### #3 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 3:1-17

God has often been pleased to show His power and presence by conquering the waters. In creation, the universe was first formed as a watery deep—without form and void, shrouded in darkness. By His Spirit, He brought form, shape, substance, and light to it. He divided waters from waters and then waters from land to create the earth that humanity inhabits. In the flood, God returned the earth to its original state by sending rain for 40 days and 40 nights, opening the floodgates above and below. While the earth was judged by these waters, Noah was saved through them in the Ark.

For Israel, too, God showed His power through the waters. In the first plague of Egypt, He turned the Nile River from water to blood as a sign of judgment. When the plagues were completed and they finally left Egypt, their deliverance from Pharaoh came through the parting of the waters of the Red Sea. Israel crossed safely on dry ground while the waters turned back, flooding

the Egyptians in judgment.

This past water ordeal was seen and experienced by the previous generation of Israelites. Under Joshua, they witnessed a reenactment and reiteration of the same revelation of God's power through the Jordan River.

Rivers are often used as natural borders between nations and states. This has been the case since ancient times. Both geographically and spiritually, the Jordan River is a key marker identifying the boundaries of the land of Israel. To cross the Jordan is to move into God's country where His power and presence are especially manifested.

For this reason, God commands that Israel receives a special sign on this occasion. Just as God parted the waters through Moses, so now He will do the same through Joshua. In fact, God gives particular instructions that help reiterate that it is His power (not Joshua's) that will be the source of their strength and victory. It is not Joshua but the priests who carry the Ark of God who will be the instruments of this wondrous miracle. The Ark specially symbolized the abiding presence of God with them. It also reminded them that this presence came only through the sacrifice of atonement offered on the mercy seat. It was a visible and sacramental representation of the sacrifice of Jesus, received by faith.

As soon as the feet of the priests who carried the Ark touched the waters of the Jordan, they stood in a heap, exposing the dry ground beneath. As in the days of Moses, Israel walked through the waters on dry ground and entered the Promised Land.

Just as God was with Moses, so He is with Joshua. But as the details of this story indicate, God's presence was not tied to either Moses or Joshua. They were but servants testifying to one who would come later: Jesus. His incarnate person was symbolized in the Ark, as is His atoning work. He is the presence of God in human flesh. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

In Him, the waters of judgment are turned into a path of salvation. Just as Israel was baptized into Moses in the Red Sea, so Christians are baptized into Christ. His death was a "baptism" that He had to undergo. This was foreshadowed in His own baptism by John in these same waters of the Jordan (Mark 1:9-11). Jesus Himself declared that His own death would be a baptism of judgment He would endure for our sakes (Mark 10:38-39). By faith in Christ, we are baptized into His death, thus passing through judgment and into resurrection life (Rom. 6:1-4; Col. 2:12).

Our strength and victory come from God alone. He will often be pleased to leave us in weak and vulnerable positions. Our enemies will surround us, and our temporal destruction at times may seem assured. But when we are weak, God will show His power. As we will see in Jericho, without lifting a sword or raising a bow, God will judge the city with a shout from the people of Israel.

God's power is manifested in our weakness. When we are emptied, God can fill us. His power and strength are received by faith. Through it, we receive Jesus and the all-surpassing power that is at work through Him. In His strength, we will

conquer—over sin, the devil, death, and hell.

Whatever trials we face in this life—physical health, emotional turmoil, or conflicts in our relationships—whatever distress or difficulty—we should remember that in Christ, we have one who has conquered our greatest enemies and is already dwelling in the victory of heaven. Let us keep our eyes of faith firmly fixed on Him who loved us and freed us from our sins by His blood. He who has wrought the greatest deliverance will bring us through every lesser trial and lead us safely to His heavenly kingdom.

# 4

## Chapter 4

### #4 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 4:1-24

In Joshua 4 we see the completion of Israel's crossing of the Jordan River into the promised land. As the Lord God parted the waters of the Red Sea, so now he parts the waters of the Jordan (4:23). As he exalted Moses in the eyes of the people, so now he exalts Joshua (4:14). God is clearly making good on his word to be with them. His supernatural power is present through his appointed leader.

The heart of the chapter contains a description of the 12 memorial stones that were erected by the Jordan to commemorate this event. The stones were to be placed in the river itself, where the priest's feet stood. The stones were apparently quite large and would have been visible in the river—much like large boulders are often clearly visible about the top of the river waters. The pattern of their arrangement is not detailed, but like other rock monuments, they would clearly show that they were put there by human hands with a clear purpose (think Stonehenge in

Great Britain).

Thus Israel would have a visible memorial to mark this momentous event. When future generations saw the large stones and were compelled to ask as to their purpose and meaning the Israelites would have the occasion to teach their children about the wondrous works of God. We still do something similar today, constructing memorials for war veterans or the victims of significant calamities in our town squares. It serves as a public reminder of the past to enrich and encourage the present.

Interestingly, this passage also indicates that the power of God for Israel will not ultimately be limited to them. Even now it is revealed to the people of the earth. The Egyptians saw it, albeit for their destruction. Rahab saw it for her salvation. In the fullness of times, it would extend to all peoples of the earth as the Gospel of Jesus Christ goes forth to the nations. The twelve stones correspond to the twelve tribes, which represent the fullness of the true Israel—not only among the Jews but also among the Gentiles.

God is still pleased to give us a visible memorial of his supernatural work. We have this in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Jesus tells us that we should "do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24). The Lord's Supper commemorates his bloody death and sacrifice for our salvation. As we noted in yesterday's devotional, the Bible likens this to a watery baptism of judgment that finds a type and shadow in this event in the days of Joshua. Jesus, the great high priest, offered himself on the mercy seat. He stopped the waters of judgment that his people might be brought safely into the promised land above.



#### CHAPTER 4

This salvation is promised to us and to our children. Next to serving and worshiping God himself, the most important thing in our lives is to pass this faith down to our children from generation to generation. May they always know that the Lord in heaven above is the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. There is no other name under heaven by which men can be saved. May we see, hear, remember, and believe in his power that brings forgiveness out of sin, light out of darkness, salvation out of judgment, and life out of death.

# 5

## Chapter 5

### #5 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 5:1-15

In the last chapter, we noted a parallel between the 12 stones of remembrance at the Jordan River and the Lord's Supper. Both include a strong element of "remembrance." Just as the rock monument helped Israel remember God's mighty works of creation, the Exodus, and the entrance into Canaan, so also the Lord's Supper would be a perpetual reminder of God's greatest work in Jesus Christ.

In fact, the chapter is filled with reminders of God's grace and mercy to his sinful people. It looks backwards to God's mighty acts of deliverance through Moses, and forward to his greatest work in the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, God instructs Joshua to have all the males in Israel circumcised. Circumcision had been established as a sacrament long before in the days of Abraham (Gen. 17). By God's command the rite was to be performed on the eighth day. The

fact that the whole nation needed a corporate circumcision like this raises the question: why? The answer we are given simply mentions in a general way that the wilderness generation died and did not see the land “because they did not obey the voice of the Lord” (5:6).

Circumcision was an external sign and seal of an internal, invisible reality. The circumcision of the flesh pointed them to the circumcision of the heart by God’s Holy Spirit (Deut. 10:16, 30:6; cf. Jer. 4:4, Rom. 2:29). The fact that the previous generation did not circumcise their children was an external manifestation of what was true of their heart. The sacrament was a double-edged sword. It sealed and confirmed to believing Israelites that God was at work in their heart. But to Israel born only according to the flesh, it was a sign of judgment. So also those that partake of the sacraments today in an unworthy and empty manner do so only for their judgment (1 Cor. 11:29).

The fact that this new nation is circumcised is a testimony to the abiding presence of God declared in the earlier chapters. Although the previous generation died in unbelief, God’s grace remains with their children.

Along with the command to circumcise the nation, Joshua is also instructed to have them observe the Passover. Circumcision and the Passover were the two chief sacraments of the OT era, corresponding most clearly to the NT sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Their observation marked Israel’s continuity with the Patriarch Abraham and the promises of God through Moses. The observation of the Passover also completed the typical reenactment of the Exodus begun in their

crossing of the Jordan River and the commission of Joshua. The whole book follows the flow of the Exodus story. Just as God commissioned Moses and equipped him with the Spirit, so he did Joshua. Just as God led them through the waters of the Red Sea, so he leads them through the Jordan. Just as he delivered them from the angel of death with the blood of the Passover, so now they observe the same feast prior to entering the land.

One day after the Passover, another detail confirms the abiding presence of God's grace. On that day the manna ceased and Israel began eating the produce of the land (5:11). God's bread from heaven was a sign of the veracity of his promises. It not only gave them earthly sustenance but was a sign and pledge of the fullness he had promised them. On this day God's promises come to fruition. What a great reminder whenever we are "in the wilderness" that God will bring us through trial and into the fullness of his blessing.

Finally, the chapter concludes with the appearance of a figure named "the commander of the Lord's army" (5:13-15). The figure is a bit enigmatic in that he appears as a "man" (5:13), but makes a declaration parallel to that given to Moses in Exodus 3:5: "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." Those were the words of the great "I AM," the one true God of Israel. Joshua also "worships" him, an act only appropriate for the one true God. He stands with a sword drawn in his hand indicating his readiness for battle. He will fight for his people.

The answer he gives when Joshua asks whether he is an ally or adversary also makes an important point. He does not simply

say “I am for you” or “I am against you.” Instead, he declares: “No, but I am the commander of the army of the Lord” (5:14). The real war is not between earthly adversaries, but between those who belong to God and those who do not. In Israel, there will be those who are not truly of God’s army as they lack true faith (see Achan in Joshua 7). Likewise, among the pagans, there will be those who repent and believe (see Rahab).

From the NT we know that this is a revelation of Jesus, the true commander of God’s army. He stands with a drawn sword to protect and defend his true church. This includes not only the enemies from without who seek to persecute it but also those within who are not truly his people. In Revelation he appears in a vision with a sharp, double-edged sword coming out of his mouth (Rev. 1:16). The sword is his word. It will strike down not only the nations but those within his church who prove themselves to be pretenders. To those in Pergamum who are empty professors and indulging in sexual immorality he declares: “Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against you with the sword of my mouth” (Rev. 2:16).

But even in judgment, there is a word of grace. The day of salvation is still at hand, and the call to repentance means deliverance is still available. If we turn our hearts away in unbelief, the commander of God’s army will bring us certain judgment. But if we cling to him in faith, no one can stand against us.

Let us then cling to Christ in faith. He is our captain and guide. He has turned defeat into victory through his cross and resurrection.

# 6

## Chapter 6

### #6 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 6:1-27

This famous chapter records the fall of Jericho when its “walls came tumbling down.” The Israelites had previously spied out this city in Joshua 2, and those who were sent escaped destruction with the help of Rahab who believed in the Lord. While the entire city was going to be destroyed, Rahab alone received a promise of deliverance. In Joshua 6 we see these plans come to fulfillment.

Jericho was Israel’s doorway to the Promised Land. As the first city of their great conquest, it held special significance for them. It was the “first fruits” of Israel’s future victories. God wanted to make the manner of their success especially clear from the outset. In future battles, God would be pleased to make his power known through human means. By faith the men of Israel would take up their swords and shields, wielding them in battle against their earthly enemies. Bravery and valor would be the fruit of their faith, through which God’s power

would be channeled through them.

With Jericho, things would be different. The primacy of faith as passive trust in God would stand at the forefront. The battle would not occur in a single day but take place only after patiently waiting an entire week. The destruction of the walls of the city would not come through human agency in sword, hammer, or other earthly force. Instead, God's power would work through sounds: the blast of a trumpet and the shout of the people. Sound waves might be able to shatter fragile glass, but they cannot take down the walls of the city. The strength of Jericho's earthly fortification stands in contrast to the weak means through which God chooses to manifest his power.

Hebrews 11:30 emphasizes that it was by faith that the walls of Jericho fell. By faith, they received the invisible power of God manifested from the unseen world of heaven above. Just as the waters of the Jordan parted with the minimal use of human agency (i.e. standing in the River with the Ark of God) so now the walls of Jericho fall with the sounds of shout and trumpet. Rahab, too, had her salvation come through "sound." It was the simple sound of her confession that the Lord alone is God in heaven and on earth.

Our salvation, too, comes through the small sound we make as we embrace Christ. When we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead we are saved. This is a confession of faith: passive trust in God's ability to work far more than we could ever ask or imagine.

There is no other way of salvation except through faith. As far as our strength is concerned, believers are among the weakest on the earth. We have no earthly power or might. The institutions of the earth seem to be in the hands of the enemies of the Gospel. As far as our righteousness is concerned, we are like Rahab: impure, unholy, and defiled with sin.

If we are to trust in our strength, we will only face certain defeats. If we are to trust in our righteousness, we will come only to certain judgment. But by faith, we trust in God's power. By faith, we receive his righteousness. When we face down our greatest enemies we have confidence and peace that the Lord himself will fight for us. This is no more evident in the moment of death when we are emptied of all earthly life and strength. As we pass from suffering into glory, we see the manifestation of the full power of God.

It is Christ, the commander of the Lord's army that fights for us. He does so in word. The word of the Gospel is the trumpet blast typified at Jericho, by which the might and power of God to save is revealed to all nations of the earth. It is ours simply to make sure that the trumpet blast is clear and faithful to what God has revealed, and to sincerely trust that it will work its power to God's appointed end.

Let us then renew our focus and faith in the power of God. To be sure, human activity is a way we can demonstrate our faith and a means God uses to test and refine us. But neither salvation from death nor growth in grace finds its ultimate source in human working. In the most difficult of times, God often leaves us with nothing we can do except to trust him. The



Psalmist expresses this in the words: “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10). Moses made a similar point right before the Exodus: “The LORD will fight for you, and you only have to be silent” (Exodus 14:14). God will bring deliverance. He will make his power known. He may tarry for a time in manifesting this in and to his saints. It is ours simply to be patient and to work his will for our good and his glory.

# 7

## Chapter 7

### #7 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 7:1-26

Israel's victory at Jericho occurred by God's special design. The walls fell by the shout of the people and the blast of the trumpet. No sword was drawn or swung in battle. No arrows were shot. No battering rams smashed against the wall. With a simple shout, the walls came down at the power of God. It was through Israel's passive trust in God's promise that God's strength and victory came to realization. God was making clear that salvation was not by human might, but the power of God. From the first battle on, Israel was to put their trust in the LORD who would fight for them. The commander of the Lord's army would be their strength and shield.

But in this fallen world moments of temporal victory will be tempered by times of failure and defeat. And so at the beginning of the conquest, both points are clearly illustrated in stories that embody both realities. Thus, the glories of faith are set in contrast to the perils of unbelief.

Like Jericho, Joshua sends men to spy out the land. This time they come and go without any threat to their life. But the narrator tells us from the outset that this will not be like the victory of Jericho. There the people shouted in faith, but here Israel breaks faith in regard to the devoted things through Achan. It is significant that the sin of one so affected the entire nation. This is, in part, because in this era of redemptive history, Israel is a theocracy. Insofar as they are a national entity their mutual fates are tied together. The prophets tell us that in the NT age, this emphasis on corporate responsibility passes away, the focus is more on individual accountability. Corporate responsibility still exists: a little leaven leavens the whole lump. But it seems more focused and limited to particular areas, such as a failure to exercise proper discipline with regard to public and scandalous sins of the members. It certainly no longer takes national form in the church. We should also note that times of war are also somewhat unique in this regard. Battles are fought according to clear plans in which each soldier must work together. Failure or unfaithfulness on the part of one can mean certain death for all. In such situations, greater levels of accountability are in place.

Achan's sin is clearly identified and confessed by him. It consisted not simply in his taking what was devoted to destruction, but his coveting them. His heart was lured away from full devotion to God through the prospect of increased wealth and riches. He thought he could serve the LORD in the open while cherishing sin in secret. No sin can be hidden before the LORD.

Some may argue that the punishment for Achan was too severe. But keep in mind that due to his sin, 36 others perished in battle.

He also put the whole nation in peril as their fighting spirit had evaporated.

Even still, we see signs of God's mercy and grace in the story. God only sent a small number of soldiers into Ai (3,000) and (relative to that number) a small percentage perished. It could have been far worse! God was teaching them a difficult lesson regarding faith and unbelief. But his purpose for the nation as a whole was for their restoration, preservation, and growth. So it is with all forms of discipline from the Lord to his chosen people.

Likewise, note that Achan hails from the tribe of Judah. This was a special tribe in that it was the one from whom the Messiah would come. Ironically, God was showing Israel that the final savior had not yet come from this tribe and that it too stood in need of God's redemptive grace.

This story of God's judgment is sobering, but it also serves as a gracious help to us in times of temptation. God had previously placed twelve memorial stones in the Jordan River, reminding God's people of his power to save. Achan is burning under a great heap of stones that remained for some time—a visible reminder of the perils of unbelief.

Let us then renew our faith in God's power and the greater riches of his heavenly kingdom. The world is good and created by God. He is sometimes pleased to bless his servants with wealth, which they are to use sacrificially to his glory and honor. But its riches pose a perilous test to our faith. Will we love treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy? Or will we

## CHAPTER 7

serve God with an eye to his treasure in heaven. As Achan illustrates, it is not possible to do both: we cannot serve both God and mammon.

# 8

## Chapter 8

### #8 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 8:1-35

Achan's sin left Israel in a defeated and confused position. God had promised to be with them. They were to be strong and courageous. God himself would fight for them and be their victory and strength. Yet at Ai, none of this had come to pass. The reason was clear: these promises were given by grace but grasped only by faith. Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. It looks to and draws upon the power of heavenly realities that transcend our temporal earth. Achan's unbelief looked only to the earth and its riches. He was blind to the greater treasure that is God's glory and honor. God graciously mitigated the damage, but the spiritual lesson was clear. Victory is achieved by faith, and faith will be manifested in obedience to God's commands.

In Joshua 8 we see a repeat of the divinely appointed assault on Ai. This time the force numbers 30,000—ten times more than their first attempt. His attack is characterized by strategic

deception. He takes 5,000 men—a small portion of his army—and sets them in ambush towards the city. When the king of Ai sees this he sends his forces to meet Joshua. 5,000 was only slightly more than the original 3,000 which he had defeated easily. Pretending to be beaten, he feigned a retreat. This drew the enemy soldiers away from the city, leaving it vulnerable to attack. The rest of his forces (stationed on the other side) then descended upon Ai, bringing it to destruction along with the army that had come to meet them in the open. The city was burned and the king was hung, after which he was buried beneath a great heap of stones.

This latter point is significant as it draws a parallel between Achan and the king of Ai. Both were buried under a great heap of stones (7:26, 8:29). The stones serve as a visible reminder of God's judgment against unbelief. God's salvation is promised to those who have faith. Rahab the Gentile and Joshua the Israelites are coheirs of the same salvation through faith. But those who are filled with unbelief will come to destruction. This is no less true of Israelites than it is of the members of enemy nations.

That this salvation is by grace through faith in invisible things is further confirmed at the end of the chapter. Here Joshua renews the covenant by building an altar and offering blood sacrifices upon it as well as peace offerings. Written on the stones of the altar were the words of the covenant. All Israel (sojourner and native-born) stood before the priests and elders in front of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal to hear the blessing and the curse.

In these things, we see typified the still unseen reality of Christ to come. He is the priest who ministers on our behalf. He is our sacrifice, through whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses. In him, we have one who has perfectly kept all the words of the covenant: his righteous obedience visibly inscribed on the stones of the altar. We have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the spotless lamb who bore our curse that we might abide in the blessing of God. In him, we have victory over all the forces of evil and the kingdom of Satan through his death and resurrection.

The work of redemption is his. It is our to trust him—to keep our eyes on the heavenly treasures of his kingdom and value them above all in our hearts. We may suffer defeat, disappointment, and trouble in this world, but our victory through him is assured in the world to come.



# 9

## Chapter 9

### #9 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 9:1-27

Reports of Israel's unprecedented victories are getting around fast. Recall how Rahab in Jericho had heard of God's powerful defeat of Pharaoh in Egypt. When a world empire suffers an embarrassing loss, it's not something that goes unnoticed. Skeptics of the historicity of the Bible have long pointed to the absence of any record of the Exodus in the Egyptian annals of history. But its absence is no anomaly. Ancient empires rarely recorded their defeats or failures in their historical records. Even their successes are highly embellished. Modern politicians have not changed much, never admitting they are wrong and exaggerating how they were "right."

Now with the total defeat of Jericho and Ai, the kings beyond the Jordan have decided to put aside their regional differences and unite against a common foe. While one might admire their bravery, their plan to fight against Israel is a fool's errand. They will ultimately fight against the Lord, before whom no one can

stand.

The Gibeonites recognize the futility of the plot, and instead take a different approach. Taking old clothes and provisions they go to the Israelites pretending to be from a far-off country. To escape certain death, they offer themselves as servants to Israel. The ruse was pretty convincing, as even Joshua fell for it and made peace with within a covenant (without consulting the Lord). After the deception was discovered, Joshua spared their lives but they became servants of Israel: cutters of wood and drawers of water for the people.

The passage presents us with a minor dilemma in that the Gibeonites were clearly deceptive (a violation of God's commandments). Likewise, they were in the area of Canaan that God had declared would be devoted to total destruction. Yet this serves as the backdrop by which a broader point is reinforced. Salvation is not by works but by faith in God's promise and power. Redemption is not limited to physical Israel but comes to all who will humble themselves before the Lord.

Note the parallel between Rahab's confession and that of the Gibeonites. In context, both involve strategic deception for a greater end: the preservation of life. The Gibeonites deceive the Israelites to preserve the lives of their families. Rahab "lies" about the location of the spies so that their lives may be spared.

More importantly, both make a confession of faith about the singular greatness and glory of the God of Israel:

Josh. 9:9-10: "From a very distant country your servants have come, because of the name of the Lord your God. For we have heard a report of him, and all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon the king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth.

Josh. 2:9-10: "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

There are differences, to be sure. Rahab is enfolded into the nation of Israel, while the Gibeonites are made servants. Rahab becomes an heir of life while the Gibeonites are simply spared from death.

But the message is clear in both. Deliverance from death and destruction is by grace through faith. The wicked Gibeonites and Rahab the prostitute are granted mercy through their confession that the Lord is the one true God. They humble themselves before his power and his glory. The simple acknowledgment that he will do what he said grants them mercy in the midst of destruction.

This is the pattern of salvation which will be revealed in the fullness of time. Salvation comes through a confession of faith that Jesus is the Lord. At his name, every knee will bow in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. Every tongue will confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father. This salvation is not simply a temporal deliverance from destruction, but salvation from eternal death. All that he requires of us is a sincere acknowledgment from the heart that he is the Lord of all. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled. The nations that opposed the armies of God came to certain destruction. But those who humble themselves will be exalted.

# 10

## Chapter 10

### #10 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 10:1-27

The story told in this book is a double-edged sword. God promises his Almighty presence and salvation to those who believe. But for those who oppose him, there is certain and total destruction. The key difference is not between Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, but faith and unbelief. Rahab the prostitute becomes an heir of Christ through faith. The Gibeonites are delivered from death through acknowledgment of the one true God. But Achan the Jew dies for his sin and unbelief.

But how far will God's power be manifested for believers? In the fullness of time, we will hear that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes (Rom. 1). So far we have seen him work through weak Israel to overthrow great armies. We have seen him stop the mighty waters of the Jordan River. We shall see even greater things than these.

In this chapter, the kings of Canaan fully processed the report of the fall of Jericho, the destruction of Ai, along with the surrender of Gibeon. Gibeon was no small city, one of the greatest in the region. If Gibeon surrendered without a fight, what is to come of the lesser cities? So Adoni-zedek, the king of Jerusalem, assembled a coalition of armies to fight against Gibeon. This will ensure that other nations will think twice before aligning themselves with Israel. In response, Gibeon summons Israel for help. Since they have made themselves servants to God's people, they are also within their rights to seek out protection from their master.

In God's providence, this meant that five kings and their armies could be dealt with all at once. God commands Israel to fight against them, declaring that he has given them into their hand. To give Israel the time needed to complete their victory, he causes the sun to stand still in the heavens for about a day.

Interestingly, the detail is easy to miss. Its utter uniqueness does not go without notice: there had never been a day like it before, and never would be afterward. But the almost casual nature of its reference underscores the power of God at work in this mighty act. It is almost as if Joshua is saying: "Oh yeah, and by the way, God made the sun stand still so that the Israelites could have victory. But that's really no big deal for God...". And because of his infinite power, even the mightiest works of God are easy for him.

Interestingly, Israel does directly participate in the battle as an instrument of God's judgment. But the majority of the victory occurs through God's direct action by sending large stones

from heaven to defeat their armies. Faith requires action to demonstrate its fruit, but victory comes from God alone.

As with Jericho, the victory over these five kings has a prospective function: it helps them look forward to their future battles with courage and confidence. As Joshua declares in 10:25: “Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous. For the Lord will do to all your enemies against whom you fight.” And so the chapter concludes with a summary of Joshua’s conquest, through the entire region of southern Canaan. Not one city is left alive. In God’s judgment, they are devoted to total destruction.

The church is no longer a political nation. We have no promises from God of military victory and conquest in battle. In fact, we have been explicitly told by Jesus to “put away the sword” (Matt. 26:52). Even in the OT, Israel’s earthly enemies were actually manifestations of their true spiritual opponents: the world, the flesh, and the devil. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. We will not take up the physical sword, but the sword of the Spirit with the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the breastplate of righteousness.

These weapons are weak in the eyes of the world. But by Christ’s power, they are mighty to save. Through them, we have the promise of total victory over all his and our enemies. Even the kings of the earth that oppose themselves to Christ will bow before him, and lick the dust beneath his feet. Every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that he is Lord. Those who bend the knee in humble faith will have salvation, those who

oppose him will be forcibly humbled and brought to certain destruction.

We who believe can press forward with faith and confidence in this power. He who caused the sun to stand still also brought Jesus for us from the grave. God brings light out of darkness, life out of death, righteousness out of sin, and peace out of conflict. He who made the sun stand still can also still the storms of the sea with his powerful word. We who belong to Jesus have nothing to fear. He will move even heaven and earth to bring us to our final salvation.



# 11

## Chapter 11

### #12 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 12:1-24

Joshua 12 contains a summary of the conquests of Moses and Joshua in the Promised Land. It serves to reinforce the succession of leadership between Moses and Joshua, as well as the broader covenant succession of God's people from generation to generation. As God was with Moses, so he is with Joshua. God's good promises are certain and true: what he declares will come to pass.

Under Moses, the Israelites defeated Og and Sihon. These kings ruled areas in the east and north of Israel. Through Joshua, Israel crossed the Jordan River by heading west across the middle of the land. The defeated kings occupied lands in southern, central, and northern Palestine. Each one is listed by name. This underscores the certainty of the destruction of God's enemies. He knows his people by name. Each one is written in heaven. He also knows his enemies. There will be no escape from his almighty power and justice.

Joshua attained greater conquests than Moses. In this sense, history is clearly progressing forward. There is also continuity in God's promise and presence from generation to generation. Yet as great as Joshua is and as wonderful as God's promises are, there is an indication that something greater is still in store for God's people.

We have noted above that there is a parallel between Joshua and Moses: as God was with Moses, so he was with Joshua. Joshua is a kind of "copy" of Moses, maintaining God's power and presence from generation to generation. But copies slowly degrade in quality over time. Although the diminishment with Joshua is minor, it is indicated in the text by the special title that Moses receives. Two times Moses is called "the servant of the Lord" (12:6). Joshua is not given this title.

Moses had a unique place in OT revelation. Although history progressed after him, no one quite measured up to his dignity and glory. That is why God promised that one day a prophet like Moses would arise. Unlike the ordinary prophets to whom God spoke in dreams and visions, to Moses he spoke face to face as a man speaks to a friend (Deut. 18:15, 18; 34:10).

Although on the level of the typological fulfillment things are moving forward, the temporary glory of Moses is slowly fading. From Joshua we will move to the era of the Judges. The succession of leadership will continue, but the glory of the leaders will fade. The copy will degrade in quality: just compare Moses and Joshua to Samson!

The reality is that Moses himself was a copy and reflection

of something greater. He was a servant in God's house. He pointed to Jesus, the Son over God's house (see Heb. 3:1-6). In his resurrection he permanently possesses the eternal glory of God in his transformed human nature. Through his death, resurrection, and ascension he has completed his conquest of the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. He is the heir and now has received the inheritance of the Promised Land. By faith in him we are conformed to his image, bearing the cross in this world that we might afterwards attain to his glory. He is worthy of greater glory than Moses and Joshua. Through him we have attained eternal rest and a heavenly inheritance. We already have the Spirit as a down payment.

Let us then hold fast to God's word in faith. Not one of the good promises of God will fail to come to pass. He may allow temporary defeats to humble us and draw us closer to him. But the final conquest is guaranteed.

# 12

## Chapter 12

### #13 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 13:1-33

Joshua 13 contains a survey of the land still to be conquered by Israel, as well as that already occupied by Israel west of the Jordan. The next chapters will continue this survey for each of the twelve tribes.

The chapters read much like a title deed to a piece of property. Those of you who own homes know that such legal documents are not always the most scintillating reading. But the fact that you do not read it often does not mean it is unimportant. In fact, for most families, their homes are the most valuable things they own. The title deed is the legal document that ratifies the ownership of their property.

These chapters of the book of Joshua contain a similar thing for the Israelites. Each was given a specific allotment of the land. This record confirms the veracity of the good promises of God: what he declares will come to pass. We see this pattern in the

days of creation. For example, on the first day, God declares, “Let there be light!” This creation fiat then infallibly comes to pass: “And it was so.” Jesus tells us: “Believe in me and you will be saved.” So we can be certain that as we trust in him, we will have full and certain salvation.

But beyond this general point about the promises of God, the text also reminds us that the LORD has even better things in store for his people.

First, we see these better things in the emphasis on Joshua’s old age. We know from the book of Judges that the full work of the conquest was to be completed after his death (see Judges 1). The work will be completed without their great leader. Joshua was a man of courage, might, and strength. Now he is old and weak. His physical weakness is a picture and encapsulation of our inherent weakness as sinners and as mere creatures.

Joshua’s weakness stands in contrast to the might of God. Even though Joshua will soon pass away, God’s might and strength abide. In the land that remains to be conquered, God declares “I myself will drive them out before you” (13:6). We have seen this emphasis before in the book. Even apart from human agency, God can work his power. Jericho will fall without the clashing of the sword or the pounding of the battering ram. Through Israel’s shout of faith, the walls come tumbling down. Salvation comes not by the working of human might, but through simple faith in the power of God.

Joshua was a great leader but had only a temporary light to shine upon Israel. He pointed us to someone greater. We have already

seen him revealed in the story. He is Jesus, the commander of the army of the Lord. He is our king. We put our trust in him. The battle will most certainly be his.

But we also see the indication of better things in what is said about the Levites. Two times in the chapter we are reminded of Levi's special role as the priestly tribe. They were given no inheritance in Israel. As later chapters indicate, they were given cities and pasture lands necessary for their existence. These were sprinkled throughout Israel (see Joshua 21). But they were not given their own territory as were the other tribes.

Why? It is because through them the Lord was teaching the whole nation that their true inheritance was something greater: God himself: "But to the tribe of Israel Moses gave no inheritance; the LORD God of Israel is their inheritance, just as he said to them" (13:33). A similar point is made in verse 14: "The offerings by fire to the LORD God of Israel are their inheritance, as he said to them." This brings into view Christ himself as the final sacrifice for our redemption.

Our ultimate hope is not in any temporal promise of God. We pray as Jesus taught us for our daily bread. He is often pleased to bless us with an ample portion of the good things of this life. But our ultimate hope and heart's desire must be in God, in Christ, and in the heavenly inheritance he has in store for us. The believing Israelites looked beyond Canaan to this better inheritance: "But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city" (Hebrews 11:16). Note how the reference to this "better country" is integrally

connected to the fact that God is not ashamed to be their God.

The Christian's chief delight and hope is in God himself—not in any specific benefit they receive from him. We cherish the giver more than any gift he can offer. We value the spring and source more than anything that flows from it. Our hope is that of the Psalmist:

“Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: But God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.” (Psalm 73:25-26)

# 13

## Chapter 13

#14 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 14:1-34

Human beings are rightly skeptical of one another, especially when it comes to their promises. We have developed several colloquial phrases to remind one another of this point. We say “talk is cheap,” and that we need to “trust, but verify.” This is not an unwise approach, especially since the Bible frankly tells us that “all men are liars.”

But God is not a man. His word is true. It is impossible for him to lie. Not one of the good promises of the Lord will fail to come to pass. This article of our confession is absolutely essential to the life of faith. Faith trusts in what is unseen, the power and blessing of which is grasped through God’s word.

This section of Joshua reinforces this essential point. In the next several chapters we will read a long survey of all the allotments of the promised land to the various tribes. It is easy to get lost in the details and miss the main point. It is



perhaps best encapsulated in Joshua 21:45: “Not one word of all the good promises of God failed to come to pass.” We need all the reminders of this truth as we can get. God has promised unspeakable blessings to his people: the forgiveness of our sins, resurrection from the dead, and eternal life. To the degree that we truly believe these promises we will be enabled to live a life of faith and holiness.

Caleb was a figure who walked in this faith and trusted the promises of God. The majority of his life was spent in war, conflict, and battle. By the time they reached the Promised Land, he had reached 85 years of age. He had been God’s faithful servant. Only he and Joshua gave a good report to the people when they were sent to spy out the land. He had wandered in the wilderness through no fault of his own, suffering with the people of God for forty years. He had every reason to doubt the good promises of God based on what he saw, felt, and experienced.

Yet God had fulfilled his promises to him. God had kept him alive, just as he said (14:10). God has also been his strength: “I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming” (14:11). It is hard to imagine an 85-year-old man who is as fit for battle as a 40-year-old. In human terms, this is impossible. But with God’s strength, nothing is impossible. Weakness is turned into strength, defeat into victory, and death into life.

In bold faith, he asks the Lord to grant him his inheritance. In that same faith, he commits himself to fight to the very end.

Earlier we saw Israel's faith when they did not lift a sword or use a battering ram to destroy the walls of Jericho. Their inactivity drew into sharp relief the core character of faith as passive trust in the Lord. Given that this was an army of younger fighting men it was a very appropriate illustration of faith's power in human weakness.

With Caleb the situation is different. Most armies would laugh at an 85-year-old invasion force coming against them. His activity in his old age highlights God's power in its own way. It makes it clear that it is the Lord who is with him and will fight for him (14:12).

Whether we are young or old the power of God is with us through faith. Even if all we can do is exist day to day, nursing our failing bodies in the last lap of life's race we have a life of faith to live. Even if we cannot attend public worship, we can offer prayers to God for ourselves and for the saints. There is no more powerful spiritual weapon than prayer. It is through those prayers that God works his saving power as well as his judgments upon the enemies of God (see Rev. 8:3-4). We are weak, but he is strong. It is ours to trust him and his good promises: all of which will most certainly come to pass.

# 14

## Chapter 14

### #15 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 15:1-63

Joshua 15 begins a tribe-by-tribe survey of the land allotted to each as an inheritance. Judah is discussed first, followed by the half-tribes of Joseph, and then Benjamin. These tribes are “out of order” in the sense that they all displace Simeon as the “firstborn.” Benjamin received prominence in the Joseph story as a mirror of Joseph when he tested the repentance of his brothers. Ephraim and Manasseh as half tribes reflect the exaltation of Joseph—with which we are all quite familiar. Judah, on the other hand, is exalted through his transformation. He began the Joseph story by arguing that they should profit from Joseph’s demise, urging his brothers to sell him as a slave. In the next chapter he has sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, thinking she is a prostitute. By the end of the story, he is offering himself sacrificially to preserve the life of his brother Benjamin for the sake of his bereaved father (see Gen. 44:18-34). This is the precise moment when Joseph was moved to tears and finally revealed his true identity to them.

In this Judah was a type of Jesus Christ: the final sacrifice who in love and compassion offered himself for his brothers, enabling reconciliation and peace with God and man. For this reason, Judah becomes a tribe of special prominence with a special promise. It will be from him that the Savior-King would come: The scepter would not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet (Gen. 49:10-12). As Christ was formed in him through faith and sanctification so the Christ would come from him through an unbroken line of kings from his body.

For these reasons, Israel's allotment is listed first. And it is a good allotment. It contains the capital city of the entire nation: Jerusalem. This will be the special place containing the Tabernacle and (later) the Temple. It is the largest both in terms of population and land area, with arguably the best land in the region. It would also be the tribe that remained faithful to God the longest, with the Northern kingdom splitting away.

Its strength and prominence give blessing and security to Israel. To the south lie the enemies of God. With its larger population and better fighting force, it ensured that smaller tribes would not easily be swallowed up on the edges of the nation. Just as many animals travel with their weakest in the center of the herd and their strongest on the outside, so God arranged the nation of Israel.

God was faithful to his promise to this tribe. We see him fulfill his promises to it and also prepare the way for the future ratification of his plan for his people in Jesus Christ.

He is the lion of the tribe of Judah who has defeated our enemy.

As that tribe came first and had a special place of prominence, so Jesus the Judahite is the firstborn from the dead and the forerunner who has gone already into our heavenly inheritance. There he is preparing a place for the rest of his people. In his Father's house, there are many rooms. In the heavenly country, there are many plots. Each one is being prepared by Jesus. It is a good land, flowing with blessedness, grace, and glory. When we pass through the wilderness and finish the fight of faith, we can be certain that these good promises of God will certainly come to pass—for us and all God's people.

# 15

## Chapter 15

### #16 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 16:1-10

After the long description of the allotment of Judah's inheritance, we turn to the tribes of Joseph: first Ephraim and then Manasseh.

Typologically speaking, these tribes had some of the clearest prefigurations of Christ in the history of the OT. Judah had a special prominence in this regard (which we discussed at length in the previous devotional). It is from Judah that the line of kings would come, culminating in the Promised Messiah.

But Joseph also served as a type of Christ. He was the beloved son of his father. If there is a pattern of exalting the younger above the older son (i.e. Abel over Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, and Jacob over Esau), then Joseph brings this pattern to narrative culmination in the book of Genesis. Joseph and Benjamin were both sons of Rachel and the youngest of the twelve. Joseph is not only exalted in being the special object of his Father's

love, but he is given dreams and visions of his father, mother, and twelve brothers bowing down to him as a ruler and king. Scorned, rejected, and humiliated several times over, God exalts him in due time.

It is not hard to discern the prefigurations of Christ's humiliation and exaltation in these events. Betrayed and rejected by his brothers, this "beloved Son" of the Father is exalted to God's right hand and made ruler and king over all.

For this reason, Joseph's special significance is acknowledged in the fact that two of his sons are given their own inheritance. Since the tribe of Levi does not have its own separate inheritance (as set apart to the Lord) Ephraim and Manasseh fill out the full number of "12" tribes.

As far as their location is concerned, they are right next to Benjamin and Judah. Those tribes constituted the foundation of Israel's defensive strength. So that can be counted as a blessing to them. They are also near the capital city of Jerusalem, where the Temple and worship of God can be found. They are also located near the city of Jericho, where Joshua's conquest of the land first began.

However, the text also contains a reminder of the temporary and typological character of these blessings in their earthly form. This allotment of land is not their final inheritance. In 16:10 we are told that they did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, but they let them remain to do forced labor for them. Judges 1 reminds us of the various ways the tribes of Israel failed to complete the conquest of the nations. They

would later become a snare and a trap for them—as the rest of the book indicates.

But this portent of failure and judgment also hides future blessings. While leaving some Canaanites in the land was technically disobedience to God, it is also a sign in his divine plan that he has greater things in store for both Israel and the nations. A greater king would come who would bring them to a better country, that is a heavenly one. The earthly land was a good gift of God, but it pointed to a better inheritance.

In Jesus, we have obtained these blessings. He now reigns as king leading a great spiritual conquest throughout the world. It is fought not with sword and spear, and the spoils of this war are not tracts of earthly land. Its weapons are spiritual: the Spirit and word of God. It calls us to victory through what seems to be defeat: the cross and sufferings of Christ. Trusting in God with our hearts set upon the heavenly treasures he has secured for us, we fight this good fight with patience, faith, love, and self-control. Our nearest enemy is our own sinful hearts, but through the power of God's Spirit, we can die more and more to sin and live to righteousness. The devil and the world will also assault us with their deception and oppression. But we will have the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.



# 16

## Chapter 16

### #17 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 17:1-18

In our last devotional, we noted the significance of the order of the tribal allotments in this section of Joshua. God has a pattern of exalting the lowly and bringing low the exalted. Judah humbles himself by offering his life for that of Benjamin and is therefore exalted as the “royal” tribe. Joseph and Benjamin are the youngest of Jacob’s sons, and they rise to prominence among the twelve tribes. As with Isaac and Ishmael as well as Jacob and Esau, the older will serve the younger.

This is a pattern that finds its ultimate fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the final “Son” of God and the true Israel. Yet he is rejected and killed by his brothers. He humbled himself to the point of the death of the cross, and therefore God exalted him as king over all.

In this chapter we round out the allotments given to the sons of Joseph: Ephraim and Manasseh. The text goes out of its way

to point out that Manasseh was “the firstborn of Joseph” (17:1). Ephraim (the younger of the two) was listed first. We thus have a continuation of the humiliation-exaltation pattern seen in the rest of the list of tribal allotments.

God was quite deliberate in making this arrangement, even over the protestations of Joseph. Of all figures in OT history (indeed, perhaps in all of human history!) Joseph should have understood God’s ways in this regard. He himself was subject to the most extreme movements from humiliation to exaltation as the “youngest.” Yet when he presented Ephraim and Manasseh to Jacob for a blessing, he attempted to correct his father who had “crossed” his hands to place his right hand on the younger (see. Gen. 48:17-20). But Jacob knew better. Although his eyes of flesh had grown dim with old age, his eyes of faith had improved with time. As Hebrews 11:21 states: “By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.” Just as he had been exalted over his older brother Esau, and Joseph over his, so Ephraim was blessed more greatly than Manasseh. As we already noted, this pattern comes to its culmination in the Lord Jesus Christ. Humbled in death, he is exalted in resurrection and made heir of the Promised Land above.

The text also includes a reminder of the story of the daughters of Zelophehad. Back in the book of Numbers, they approached Moses for guidance since their father had now sons. In the ancient world, land inheritance passed through the oldest male heirs. God made provision for them to carry on their father’s name and inheritance by allotting it to them. At this point in the narrative, God makes good on this promise.

I do not wish to unnecessarily clutter your “devotional meditations” with controversial subject matter. But the passage does raise an issue that has arisen in both the culture and the church. Where Scripture touches upon relevant “errors,” it is important to consider what it has to say. We need to pull out the weeds in the garden of faith even as we fertilize the ground with God’s spiritual truth. Both are important for our preservation and growth in the faith.

Some have used this passage to justify a modern “egalitarian” view of men and women. It is perhaps the most popular OT story to promote the idea that the Bible promotes a view akin to what goes by the name of “feminism.” The Bible is clear that men and women are equally made in God’s image, coheirs of the grace of life, are to live in mutual love and respect with one another, and are one in Christ Jesus. There is a long history of the human race in their sinful depravity of abuse, mistreatment, and even violent oppression. This includes sinful acts by men against women. At times these sinful activities have become embedded in cultures to create patterns of ungodliness that are worthy of condemnation. Insofar as a feminist history points these things out and condemns them, we can obviously say “amen” and pray for proper change in our lives and in the culture. But the fact that a paradigm rightly identifies a sin or error does not make it true.

In creation God created an order for human life, reflected in the institutions of the family and in the church. Adam was formed first and then Eve. God commissioned Adam and later formed Eve from his own flesh to be his suitable helper. In some respects they were equal before God as image bearers.

In their lives there was an order he revealed to them which is also reflected in nature. As the husband, Adam was the head of his wife. This did not mean he could lord it over her, but that there was an order to their relationship which reflected the sameness-with-differences between them in their created constitutions.

This order was upended by the devil and corrupted through human sin. Instead of humbly serving one another in their respective roles as head and body, sin introduced pain and alienation between them. It is perhaps best encapsulated in God's word to Eve: "Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). Ironically, this same phrase is used to describe the dynamic we face with sin and temptation (Gen. 4:7). Both will experience pain and alienation in their "realms" of activity. The man will have pain in his labor on the earth and she will have pain in her labor of childbearing. Rather than moving them to sympathy for one another, there will be blame and alienation (see Gen. 3:12-13).

It was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman—who became a transgressor. These phrases will deeply offend the modern mindset, but they are the express words of Scripture (1 Tim. 2:13-14; see also 2 Cor. 11:3). None of this justifies or minimizes the mistreatment of women by men. This would be a great and heinous sin. None of this excuses Adam's part in the fall of man. Indeed, as the head of the human race he bears the greater responsibility. It is his sin, after all, that is imputed to the human race (see Rom. 5:12ff). It is to say that the solution to the problems of the abuse and mistreatment of women by men is not to upend the order that God established in creation.

Ironically, the story of the daughters of Zelophehad maintains these elements of truth in proper balance. Recall that their chief concern is not for their individual rights, but for the perpetuation of the name of their father: “Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son” (Num. 27:4). Their complaint is also directed not against men, but a heretofore unaddressed problem in God’s revelatory provision. The daughters of Zelophehad come before Moses because he is the agent of God’s revelation. The Lord responds by granting them provision (and those in similar situations) to have their father’s inheritance kept intact. Indeed, even if he has no sons or daughters, it shall be given over to the nearest kinsmen. Indeed, at God’s command Zelophehad’s daughters were married to men in their own clan in order to preserve the integrity of that’s tribes inheritance (Num. 36:5ff). The overriding concern is not the “rights” of any individual person or group, but the integrity and preservation of God’s promised inheritance.

Moses does not here upend the order of creation in the relationships he established between men and women in the church or in the family. To use this passage to that effect is to use one Scripture to destroy another.

This teaching will strike people differently depending on their current situation and life experience. Biblically speaking, the rejection of the worship of the one true God and the fact that God created man in his own image male and female is the starting point for a downward spiral of depravity (see Romans 1). Within this downward spiral is the sad and tragic reality of abuse by men towards women—indeed, of all those in authority

over those under their care. This includes citizens mistreated by the state, children by their parents, and employees by their employers. In none of these contexts does the Bible endorse “solving” the problems of oppression by upending the order of God in creation and providence. Anarchy is not a solution for tyranny, nor is chaos to a sinful overemphasis on order.

The passage does, however, anticipate a time when both men and women will no longer be married or given in marriage but made like the angels of God. While we must reflect the order of God’s creation during our lives on this earth, a time is coming when both men and women will join fully and equally together as coheirs of God’s heavenly inheritance. The order of the first creation will be transformed in the order of the new creation. The heavenly inheritance secured by Christ is not transferred through human heirs from generation to generation but is granted equally to all who are in Christ Jesus.

The daughters of Zelophehad looked in faith to that future inheritance. Humbled as a family, they were exalted by God’s grace. Men and women are to labor together according to God’s pattern in love, faithfulness, and mutual service as they look to the heavenly inheritance to come. Rejecting the deception of the devil on the right hand and on the left, they keep their eyes on Christ who is preparing for them an allotment in the heavenly inheritance above. In these we humble ourselves—but God will exalt us in due time!

## Chapter 17

### #18 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 18:1-28

We find ourselves in the heart of the book of Joshua, which outlines the allocation of land inheritance for the 12 tribes of Israel. Much of it reads like a verbal description of a map, which is precisely what it is! However, we have already observed the great theological significance embedded in the structure of the passage. Those tribes that most clearly embody types of Christ are given prominence and come first. Judah is the tribe from which the Messiah will directly descend and thus takes the lead. The sons of Joseph come next, and for good reason. Joseph's pattern of humiliation and exaltation is a clear foreshadowing of Christ's future work for our redemption.

Gad and Reuben had previously received their inheritance under Moses (Josh. 13:8). Levi is set apart for the Lord as a priestly tribe, leaving seven tribes still awaiting their allotted inheritance. The number "seven" holds obvious significance as the number of fullness. While certain tribes are given redemp-

tive prominence due to their special typological significance, God will not neglect to fulfill his promises to the entirety of Israel.

Interestingly, of these seven tribes, Benjamin is listed first. Alongside Joseph, he was among the youngest of Jacob's sons, both born through Rachel. In fact, Rachel died while giving birth to Benjamin. In each figure, we discern the humiliation-exaltation pattern. Benjamin was the youngest among the twelve brothers and, in the Joseph story, received a fivefold portion of food during his "test" of their sincerity. He recreates the same situation he faced in his family to see if his brothers had truly changed. Rachel was the favored wife of Jacob, but God exalted Leah with more children (Gen. 29:30). Later, when Rachel was despised by her sister, God opened her womb and gave her two sons: Joseph and Benjamin (Gen. 30:22).

Once more, the humiliation-exaltation pattern determines the order of the tribes. Just as Judah, Ephraim, and Manasseh precede the others, Benjamin leads the remaining seven tribes as an example of God's granting prominence to the lowly, whom he exalts by his powerful hand.

Lastly, it's worth noting that Benjamin is among the smallest tribes. Although humble and lowly, it is exalted by its geographical proximity to Judah and the capital city of Jerusalem. Benjamin's blessedness is found in its nearness to the womb of the Savior who will arise from this royal tribe.

Such is the blessedness of every member of the true spiritual Israel. We desire nothing more than to be near Christ in our



## CHAPTER 17

feelings, thoughts, and actions. In him, we are lowly in the eyes of the world, but in due time, we will be exalted through faith in the power of God.

## Chapter 18

#19 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 19:1-51

This chapter completes and rounds out the allotment of land for the rest of the 12 tribes of Israel. Judah, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin all had a special typological significance in their foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was also true in a different way for the tribe of Levi. Set apart as priests to God they had no earthly inheritance.

While Benjamin is technically included with these 7 remaining tribes, he is exalted from his lowly position as the youngest of the brothers. The humiliation-exaltation pattern of Jesus is thus reinforced in both sections of the tribal allotments.

Reuben and Gad had already obtained their inheritance under Moses. So chapter 19 with Simeon, the second born of Israel. God is faithful to his promise to grant the inheritance to all his people. But surely this would have been a humbling moment for the tribe. He was among the oldest but comes well down the

line in order. Additionally, their allotment is within the borders of the tribe of Judah. They are “landlocked” and surrounded by their exalted younger brother. In Jacob’s last words to his sons, he points particular to Simeon’s violent ways in their taking vengeance on the Schechemites. The humble allotment reflects Jacob’s cursing of their anger and wrath (Gen. 49:5). Ultimate victory for this nation will never come through anger, violence, and the sword. A lion will arise to save them from Judah who will do battle as a sacrificial lamb.

After this comes the inheritance allotted to Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, Dan, and last of all, Joshua himself. A full treatment of these tribes could trace the fulfillment of God’s promised blessing to each tribe in the Lord Jesus Christ. These “minor tribes” are easily overlooked, but they still find their hope in him. For example, the Gospel of Luke points out that the Prophetess Anna was from the tribe of Asher. She was among the faithful remnant of Israel and saw the Lord’s Christ in the flesh and spoke of him to all who were waiting for Jerusalem’s redemption.

This text is a reminder that although there may be a certain order of prominence among the saints, there is still a fundamental equality as co-heirs of heavenly glory. Some will (metaphorically) receive ten cities, others five, and still others less (see Luke 19:11-27). In some way, there will be degrees of glory in heaven. At the very least, those who have suffered the most in this life for Christ’s sake will take the greatest delight in future glory.

But in the final analysis, we will all be in the same place with

the same Christ and partakers of the same glorious eternal life. One day Jesus shall come on the clouds. All God's people, both living and dead shall be glorified together. We shall be caught up with him to meet the Lord in the air, and thus shall all God's people always be with the Lord (see 1 Thess. 4:17).

## Chapter 19

### #20 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 20:1-9

After surveying the allotments of land to the twelve tribes of Israel, the book of Joshua now turns to some details regarding cities of refuge for manslayers as well as cities and pasture lands for the tribe of Levi. Chapter 20 outlines the various cities set aside as cities of refuge.

We have addressed these before in various places in the Books of Moses (Num. 3; Deut 4, 19). They were a reminder of both the grace and mercy of God as well as the fact that we still live in an estate of sin and misery. In many respects, the theocracy of Israel was as close as humanity has ever gotten to a return to the Garden of Eden. Visible imagery reinforcing this fact was present through the Tabernacle and (later) the temple. The Bible also explicitly draws the connection between Canaan and Eden (see Gen. 13:10; Is. 51:3; Joel 2:3).

However, these echoes of Eden were bittersweet. Not only did

Israel never fully attain to the typological blessedness in their national life, Eden itself was a copy of something greater: a heavenly Paradise of confirmed and unchangeable eternal life. Adam had this set before him in the weekly Sabbath, which reminded him of his eternal rest which would be his upon completion of his task. The tree of life was also a sacramental pledge of this eternal state (see Gen. 3:22).

The need for cities of refuge was a reminder that God's people were no longer in the true paradise of God. The garden was a place of life. But in Canaan, the reality of death—even tragic death—was all around them. These cities of refuge were set aside for those who had accidentally killed another or took a life without the intent to do so. It is only in a fallen and sinful world that such events take place. Intentional murder is a greater tragedy, but at least there is the possibility of justice for those who have been victimized by the crime. Unintentional death leaves us empty having to ask the hard question: “Why?” Why would God allow this tragedy to happen? Why would God permit the accidental taking of a life? What purpose is there for this? It also leaves the person who caused the death haunted by grief and regret. Those who have survived car accidents in which the other person died are left with deep pain and emptiness.

The city of refuge reminds us of the tragic character of this fallen world, but also of the mercy and grace of God. In these places, no avenger of blood could touch the manslayer. The one who caused the death of another could be protected until he stood before the congregation for an orderly process of justice and judgment. In the midst of death, life would be preserved.

The city of refuge was thus a wonderful picture of God's mercy in Christ. His grace is so deep it grants mercy to murderers. Those who joined in the crucifixion of Jesus were the objects of his prayers for forgiveness while he hung on the cross. Ironically, the people chose to save a murderer (Barabbas) while delivering the Author of Life over to death. The Apostle Paul also joined in the condemnation of Stephen, aiding and abetting those who murdered him with stones.

But God also has a special eye upon those who suffer from tragic, accidental deaths—both for those who cause them and those who suffer for them. God's love and mercy fill the empty holes in the hearts of the grieving and is a place of refuge for those who caused them. All of this is through Jesus, who unjustly suffered intentional murder and execution that he might have mercy upon us all.

## 20

### Chapter 20

#21 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 21:1-45

Last but not least, the book of Joshua outlines the allotment of pasture lands and cities for the tribe of Levi. Levi was a special tribe, set apart for the Lord for the maintenance of the worship of God and the instruction of the people in his word. They had no physical inheritance in Israel. The Lord was their inheritance. They were a living embodiment of the spiritual truth that Israel's hope was not in anything earthly. The land was but a temporary type. It directed them to a better country, that is, a heavenly one.

Even while it pointed them to heaven, the tribe still existed on the earth. As such there were still earthly necessities to which they needed to attend and earthly needs that needed to be met. Therefore God allotted them certain areas for pasture lands and certain cities where they could dwell.

These were sprinkled throughout Israel in a strategic way. 48



cities were set apart throughout the land, with a relative balance between the northern and southern areas. However, there were more on the west side of the Jordan than on the east as the west was a larger area.

In this way, the Levitical cities would be fairly evenly spaced throughout the entire land.

The priests were largely supported through the tithes and offerings of the Israelites. At the same time, they were given cities and lands to dwell in, raise livestock, and live day to day. The priestly tribe of Levi was therefore special but also ordinary. We might take an analogy from the Sabbath day. It is a special day devoted to rest and worship, but works of necessity and mercy are permitted. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So also the earthly necessities of the Levites were provided for through the allotments of pastureland and cities.

God's purpose in this was strategic. The priesthood obviously served to maintain the worship of God in Jerusalem. They took turns in the various tasks necessary for the maintenance of their formal worship in Jerusalem. During the rest of the time the priests served a more fundamental function among the people: to teach them the word of God. Malachi 2:6-7 speaks of the faithful priest in these terms:

“True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.”

Malachi's indictment of the priests highlights their failure to perform this very task:

"But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts, and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways but show partiality in your instruction." (Mal. 2:8-9).

Insofar as the Levites were a "priestly" tribe attending to the temple and the sacrifice, they were types of the Lord Jesus Christ. Insofar as they were teachers of God's word the principle of ordained leadership in the church continues to this day. Paul himself argues from the support of the Levitical priests in the OT to the support of the Gospel ministry in the NT (1 Cor. 9:13-14). The worker is worthy of his wages (1 Tim. 5:18). He gives himself full time to teaching and to preaching. But they remain ordinary human beings with ordinary needs, concerns, and necessities.

The passage concludes with a reminder of God's faithfulness in keeping his promises. The concluding passage underscores the broader message of the larger section and outlines the specific allotments of the land to each tribe. We may have asked ourselves: Why all the specific details about the borders of each tribe? Here we read the answer: the meticulous description of the precise areas allotted to each tribe underscores the unchanging veracity of the good promises of God.

Not one word of God will fail. Not one detail will be missed.

Every name of every elect saint will be accounted for, for they are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. He is our final priest, our city of refuge, and the Shepherd of the best pastures in heaven above. He will keep his word to each of his saints. It is ours simply to trust the One who promises and live accordingly.

# 21

## Chapter 21

#22 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 22:1-34

When Moses was still alive, two of the tribes asked to receive their inheritance early. Reuben and Gad saw the land on the east side of the Jordan and knew right away it was the perfect spot for them. Those tribes were blessed with a great deal of livestock, and the pastureland in that area were perfect for them. The potential problem with their request was that if they settled there early, the other tribes would be short-handed in their conquest of the rest of the land. In Numbers 32 we read how Reuben and Gad committed themselves to fight to the end with their brothers until the whole conquest was completed. Manasseh also had been given an “early” inheritance and was included in this arrangement (Num. 32:33).

Joshua 22 records that these tribes made good on their commitment. They kept their promise to the Lord and have not forsaken their brothers. This was a promise that was kept by faith in God’s greater promises. After all, the fighting men were

going off to war, during which they had the real possibility of losing their lives. What good is it to lose your life fighting to help another man win his land if you risk never being able to enjoy your own? The Israelites in Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh trusted in God's promise of a greater inheritance above. They knew that even if they died in battle for their brother's land, they would still gain a better land in heaven.

This story also prefigures the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for his people. He became like his brothers in every way so that as our high priest he might make atonement for our sins. He was already in possession of heavenly glory, but he left it to fight for his brothers so that they too might share in it. He had nothing to gain and everything to lose. But he fought for us faithfully to the end—and will continue to do so as our exalted king.

After this, we read the story of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh building a very large altar of witness by the banks of the Jordan River. At first, the other tribes are concerned that this is an act of rebellion after the pattern of their sin at Peor or Achan at Ai. The three tribes respond by clearly indicating that the altar is to serve as a memorial for their children and that they too are part of the nation of Israel. The Jordan River provided a natural boundary between them and the rest of the nation. Such natural boundaries tend to limit interactions between neighboring peoples, which leads them to develop independent cultures and identities. The altar was to serve as a reminder that they had equally shared in the nation of Israel and (in particular) the worship of the one true God.

In all these stories we see a wonderful juxtaposition of the

faithfulness of God with the Spirit-wrought faithfulness of his people. In union with our covenant God we reflect his character in our life, especially our words and commitments. In Joshua 21 we read that all the good promises of God have and will most certainly come to pass. In Joshua 22 we read how Israel also kept its promises and commitments in covenant fidelity to him.

What was true in Joshua's day remains true today. All the promises of God are "Yes" and "Amen" in the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 1:20). He will be faithful to his word. The righteous man keeps his word even if to his hurt (Psalm 15:4). We see this clearly in Jesus he not only declared his love for his friends but proved it when he laid down his life as a sacrifice for us. If Christ so loved us, so also we ought to love him and one another. As the church of Jesus, we are called to bear not only our own burdens but also the burdens of others. United in faith, commitment, and love we thus grow more and more in the image of Christ our head and king.

## 22

### Chapter 22

#### #23 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 23:1-16

The book of Joshua began with two charges: one from the Lord to Joshua and another from Joshua to the people. As it began, so it ends. Joshua 23-24 contains two charges from Joshua: first to the leaders (23) and then to the people (24).

The chapter begins with a large time jump. Joshua is now old and advanced in years. The conclusion of this book mirrors the last words of Moses to the people, largely outlined in Deuteronomy. The parallels reinforce the theological point made earlier in the narrative: as God was with Moses, so he is with Joshua.

The charge begins with a reminder of the faithfulness of God. As we saw in our survey of the middle portion of the book, this is one of the main themes of the book. Not one of the good promises of God will fail to come to pass. They can trust the Lord. He is truth itself, and he has demonstrated his fidelity

in centuries of fulfilled promises. The truth of God's word is the bedrock and foundation of our faith. Infidelity shatters a relationship because it destroys its foundation: trust. God has given us plenty of evidence to buttress our faith, even when he calls us to go through a season of battle and difficulty for his sake. His faithfulness gives us strength and courage. Even if a vast army is arrayed against us and we stand all alone, we remember that with one man God can put to flight a thousand (23:10).

But in his providence, God left something by which to test their faith and loyalty to him. Although the armed conflict of sword and spear has ended, the spiritual battle against sin and temptation has not. God was pleased to leave a remnant of the foreign nations among them to see whether they would remain faithful to him. Just as God allowed the serpent to enter the garden to test Adam and Eve, so now he tests them with these people. He warns them against intermarriage with them and especially the worship of their false gods.

The warning is a sobering one. God's faithfulness to his word is a double-edged sword. If we cling to him in faith, we can be certain of our ultimate salvation and victory. But if we betray him in unbelief and rebellion, he will by no means clear the guilty. The faithful he will most certainly bless, but the faithless he will most certainly judge. God's good blessing will most certainly come to pass. So also will his terrible curses upon the wicked.

These words are not simply a theoretical warning. As Israel's subsequent history demonstrates, they are implicitly prophetic.



Later generations of Israel will quickly abandon the Lord, devolving into depravity such that every man does what is right in his own eyes.

There is a good reason why this address is given to the leaders of Israel. They are charged with the faithful stewardship of God's word. They are to be very strong and "keep...all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left" (23:6). The main task of church leaders is to ensure the faithful proclamation of this word to the people, and that it be faithfully followed in the worship and lives of the people. There is no total escape from sin in this life. But as long as God's word is among us, his light and truth are there to guide us. But without his word, we are blind and have no light in this dark world.

But even when God's leaders are faithless and the light of God's word is nearly snuffed out, he will make his light shine in the darkness. So in the days of Josiah when the Book of the Law was so neglected it was lost, God worked to bring forth its light once again.

In Jesus, we have one greater than Joshua or Josiah. They were lights that burned for a while and then passed away. Jesus is the light of the world who will shine forever. He is our faithful shepherd who kept God's word perfectly, turning neither to the right hand or to the left. Those who have been appointed to lead in his name have been equipped with the power of God's Spirit and the fullness of his revelation in the prophets and apostles. Although many battles lie ahead for God's church, we can be certain that he will manifest the greatness of his power

for the salvation of his elect people.

# 23

## Chapter 23

#24 - Devotional Meditations on Joshua 24:1-16

This book began with a charge to both Joshua and to the people. The Lord charged Joshua to be strong and courageous and promised that he would be with him all his lifelong. Likewise, Joshua charged the people to remember God's promise and fight to the end with their brothers to take possession of the land.

Yesterday we noted that just as the book began, so it now ends. Joshua 23 contains a final charge to the people of God. Having walked by faith and taken hold of the promises of God in their earthly inheritance, Joshua is now about to go the way of all flesh and pass into his heavenly inheritance.

Joshua's last words begin with a survey of God's dealings with them from the Patriarchal period. In this sense, the entire history of redemption (to this point) is contained in this Scripture. The historical survey focuses on what has

been central to this stage of Israel's story: the Promised Land. He promised it to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He led Israel out of Egypt so that he might redeem them and take them to his holy place. Under Joshua, he faithfully fulfilled his purposes by driving out the nations and granting them rest from their enemies. Special emphasis is given to the grace and power of God in working these blessings for his people. It is God's sovereign power that is determinative, not the might of man. The people cried to the Lord in their distress, and God graciously answered. He brought them into the land. He destroyed their enemies. He turned Balaam's curse into a blessing. He sent the hornet before them to defeat their enemies. It was not by their sword or bow that they had the victory, but God's gracious deliverance. The cities, lands, and vineyards that they now dwell in were built by others and given to them freely. The land came "fully furnished" to underscore the depths of God's grace, love, and faithfulness to his people.

As with the type, so with the anti-type. God's redeeming work is not the combination of man's merits and his grace. Our salvation comes solely through the working of God's power to redeem. Our part in the process is to confess the sin from which we need to be saved and trust that he can work what we cannot. What is impossible with man is possible with God. To be sure, there is an active component of faith by which we love and obey God. But this also flows out of faith as passive trust in God's invisible power.

In this part of the "charge," God reveals himself to be a faithful covenant keeper. In union with this covenant God, they are thus called to reflect this loyalty and commitment. He does

not ask to be repaid, but only that he be appreciated, loved, glorified, and trusted in his provision for his people. Such is the grace of the Gospel. All he requires of us is to accept the gift of God with a true, sincere, and thankful heart of faith. That faith will show its vitality in a life of love. This will most clearly manifest itself in the faithful worship of the one true God.

Like Moses before them, Joshua sets before them the way of life and faith against the way of unbelief and death. The people boldly declare their intended purpose to worship only the Lord their God, but Joshua gives them a sober reminder of the fickleness and inability of their still sinful natures to serve God perfectly: “You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God” (Josh. 24:19).

Many of us post Joshua 24:15 in our homes: “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” There is good reason to do this, as it serves as a visible reminder that Christ is the head of each home to be glorified in all that we do. But we might do well to also post Joshua 24:19 next to it. It is a sober reminder that even the holiest saints still have the remnants of the flesh within them. While they have been renewed by God’s Spirit to truly desire his glory and honor, the flesh within them only desires to sin (see Rom. 7:14).

As we mentioned above, it is very significant that the “test” of their future fidelity and oath-commitment will be whether they remain faithful in preserving and attending to the worship of the one true God. The neglect of it is a sure sign of spiritual decay among the people, as is the modification of the worship of God to make it conform to the patterns of the surrounding

cultures. So in our lives, a great test of our spiritual vitality is our faithfulness to God's word and worship in both private and public. Sincere thankfulness naturally expresses itself in expressions of appreciation and gratefulness. The supreme manifestation of this on the part of God's redeemed people is to worship him with glad and joyful hearts.

Under Joshua, the people would remain faithful. But soon after his passing these faith-commitments would soon be broken as they devolved into a cycle of rebellion, judgment, and restoration in the time of Joshua. The gradual failure of Israel was a sure sign that the final "Joshua" had not yet come and that God had greater things in store for them.

This Savior has come in the person of Jesus. He has brought the fullness of his Spirit to all of God's elect in the four corners of the earth. He is our faithful covenant keeper, obeying God perfectly in all things that he might be our High Priest. He calls us to a battle—to fight the good fight of the faith. Fully equipped with the full armor of God we take our stand against the evil one. Although his forces are greater, the power of Christ is greater. We fight with our brothers knowing that in this life we will not attain to the final inheritance. Like Joseph we walk by faith, knowing that even through death God will not forsake his promise. Even as Joseph's bones were buried at Shechem in fulfillment of God's word, our bones will come to life by that same word when the dead hear the voice of the Son of Man and rise to live.

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## Conclusion

