

The People of God and Their Inheritance

by T. Austin-Sparks

The book of Joshua is a call to spiritual leadership and a reminder that the inheritance in fulness hangs upon the strength of the believer.

Scripture: Joshua 1:6-9, John 16:32, Galatians 5:17, Ephesians 6:10, Hebrews 4:8

Topics: "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "Inheritance"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the people of God entering their inheritance as depicted in the book of Joshua, drawing parallels to the New Testament. He highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding believers into their spiritual inheritance, which is often met with conflict and opposition. Joshua's leadership symbolizes the energy of the Spirit, urging believers to remain steadfast and courageous in their pursuit of God's promises. The sermon calls for a fresh, youthful spirit among Christians, encouraging them to abide in God's presence and adhere to His Word. Ultimately, the message is a reminder that the Holy Spirit empowers believers to overcome challenges and claim their inheritance in Christ.

Transcript

Reading: Joshua 1.

"It came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as prince of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant? And the prince of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Put off thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so" (Joshua 5:13-15).

The counterpart of the book of Joshua is found in the New Testament, especially from and with the Gospel of John onward. When you come to the end of the four Gospels, you find yourself at the self-same place as that which you find just before the book of Joshua opens. That is, a nation has come to the border of the Land of Promise - which border is, in this case, symbolically, the Jordan - and that nation has turned back and lost everything through unbelief. That is how it was before this book of Joshua opens. That is exactly how it was at the end of the Gospels. The nation to whom all the promises were offered for fulfilment came to that border land: through unbelief they were turned back and lost everything: and for the last two thousand years they have been experiencing a living death in the wilderness.

But a new nation springs into being. It is with that that we have to do as we open this book of Joshua, and it is that with which we have to do when we pass from John into Acts. A new nation has arisen out of the death of the old, and is now going in and on to possess.

The Ark of the Covenant went its lonely way through the Jordan. You remember that the Lord commanded that the Ark was to move ahead into the river, then in flood, and that a space of two thousand cubits was to be observed between it and the people. It was taking a lonely way, a way which it alone could take. We all know that that Ark represents the Lord Jesus Himself, and its passage through the Jordan typifies His passage through the Cross. "Ye... shall leave me alone", He said; "and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (John 16:32). There is a space; He took a lonely way through the Cross. No one else can go that way as fully as He went; thank God, it is not necessary. He first met all the overflowing of Jordan - God's judgment, God's wrath, God's separation; it was a terribly lonely way. "Why hast thou forsaken me?" He cried to Heaven (Matt. 17:46). The 'Ark' went that way, to lead the way through for us, that we might have a dry passage, and might not be overwhelmed of Jordan.

I do not think that we really make enough of what He has borne for us, and of how little we have to bear because of that. If we know something of the Cross, if we know something of the fellowship of His sufferings, we know nothing of the judgment of God that rested upon Him. Nothing that we know has to do with judgment - not one whit. As the Ark went its lonely way to lead that people through, so He, by the Cross, has opened a way - a way into the inheritance.

Joshua and Amalek

At that point, Joshua comes into view in full stature, as representing, or indicating, the instrument of God for spiritual fulness. It would be instructive to spend a few minutes on Joshua in that light. Joshua stands for the mighty life and energy of the Holy Spirit. When the Captain of Jehovah's hosts, the Holy Spirit in figure there, joined Himself with Joshua, and joined Joshua with Himself, all that issued and proceeded was by the energy of the Holy Spirit. Everything thenceforth showed the Holy Spirit in charge and in action. Joshua, then, speaks of the Holy Spirit uniting Himself with a vessel for the purposes of the inheritance.

You remember that Joshua first comes into view in relation to Amalek (Exodus 17). Amalek is the type of the flesh, coming out to thwart, to prevent, to straddle the path of Israel, that they should not come into the inheritance. The flesh always does that. Satan has a ready ally in the flesh, and by the energy of the flesh he would always keep the Lord's people out of the inheritance. Joshua first comes in then against Amalek. You see already, well in advance, when he first comes into view, that he signifies that which is of the Spirit warring against the flesh. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh", says the Apostle (Gal. 5:17). Joshua is there, as the energy of the Spirit, to deal with this obstructing and hindering and thwarting flesh, with the inheritance always in view. It is important always to remember that, and to keep it in its place. Why must we walk in the Spirit? Why must the flesh be dealt with? Not just for its own sake, but because the great inheritance in Christ is in view.

Joshua and the Tent of Meeting

The next occasion on which he is referred to is in Exodus 33. He is spoken of here as "a young man" who "departed not out of the Tent" (v. 11). I think that is a very beautiful touch, not only in the case of Joshua himself, but in the whole spiritual background of this story. What was this Tent? It was, of course, not the Tabernacle, because the Tabernacle was not in existence at that time. You have to go back to the

occasion when Moses went up into the mount to receive the Law, and the pattern of the Tabernacle. He came down, and Israel had 'broken loose' and had made a calf, and were saying: 'These be thy gods which brought thee out of Egypt!' (Ex. 32:4). Joshua was there. But, when Moses came down, and heard and saw, he stood in the gate of the camp, and cried: 'Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come over unto me!' Now, from that time onwards, what Moses did was to take a tent, a 'tent of meeting', right outside of the camp, and "everyone which sought the Lord went out unto the tent of meeting" (Ex. 33:7). That was the Tent in which Joshua, the young man, abode, and from which he did not depart.

It is full of significance, is it not? First of all, that Tent out there implied absolute separation from every taint of Satan's touch. Satan had captured the gold of the Sanctuary, and had it made into a calf for his own worship: Satan had turned the heart of the people from the Lord to himself, and corrupted everything. If the inheritance is going to be entered upon and appropriated, that touch and that taint of the corrupting influence of the evil one amongst the people of God has got to be removed, and everything of God has got to be taken out of its precincts. Joshua, therefore, abiding and not departing from the Tent; this man of the Spirit, this man who is to bring into the inheritance by the energy of the Spirit; the man who abides beyond the taint and the touch of the powers of evil, says so clearly that he is not in that world, he is out of that realm altogether. He abides in the Tent of meeting. I like to think that there was one man, besides Moses, who was not a priest, but a man of the people, who was allowed to dwell in the House of the Lord.

Joshua as a "Young Man"

But then it says that Joshua was a 'young man'. Surely this speaks of freshness - the freshness of youth, with everything before; vision, purpose, a future; a life of energy in the Spirit; no touch of time, or old age, here. It is a very blessed thing. Oh, that we were all characterized by this youth! Here is where a part of our watchfulness and prayerfulness must be observed. It is always such a joy to meet with young Christians, who are reaching out for everything of the Lord; not satisfied with being just saved, but really after all that the Lord means for them. Because there are some of the Lord's people who 'know it all', and have heard it all for years, so that you can hardly say a thing, even about the book of Joshua, but they know all about it - 'Oh, you have gone over that ground again and again!' They are so stale, and everything to them is so stale: it is like bread which has been locked up for years - it has got absolutely dry; and so you cannot say anything to them; there is no freshness. But then you find a group of young Christians, and there is life, there is freshness, and you can give and give.

That is not a matter of years: it is a matter of spirit. And it ought to be like that. If we are going to come into the inheritance, we must always have an appetite for it. If we are going to come into the inheritance, there needs always to be this vigorous spirit, this energy, this reach-out; this consciousness that, however much we know, we know nothing. We see so much before us - that 'land of far distances' that our eyes have seen; and yet, with all that we know, we know that we are only touching the fringes. It ought to be like that to the end: the spirit of youth, and youth's energy, ought to mark us. Sometimes it is very difficult to give a message amongst people who 'know it all', and have heard it all before: there is a sense of heaviness and hard going - simply because there is not this drawing out of a spiritual energy to know, to apprehend. Joshua, then, was a 'young man, who departed not from the tent of meeting.'

The Holy Spirit and the Conflict of Possession

Now, when we come to this fifth chapter of the book of Joshua, to those three verses that we read, we come to what is the very heart and essence of the book of the Acts. With John, the Land comes into view.

With Acts, the Spirit takes over. He takes over this whole matter of the inheritance, and of leading the people of God into possession. But it is along the line of conflict. Yes, He takes over in relation to the inheritance, but note how immediately it becomes a matter of conflict. If that Man standing over against Joshua, declaring Himself to be the Captain of the Hosts of the Lord, is (in figure, if not in reality) the Holy Spirit, as we believe He is, note that He has a sword drawn in His hand - He has not come with an olive leaf! He has come with a sword, and it is drawn.

There is going to be not one whit of this inheritance possessed without conflict. We need to make up our minds to that, for that is how it is going to be. There is going to be a withstanding from all quarters. As soon as the matter of any spiritual increase comes into view, then, strangely, sometimes mysteriously, a state of conflict arises. It gets into the very atmosphere, and it comes even from Christian people. Be satisfied with what is called 'the simple gospel', and 'simple evangelism', and you meet no conflict; everybody applauds and accepts, and is on your side. But - set your heart on the whole purpose of God, and you find yourself at once in a realm of terrible conflict. Satan is not going to allow this Church to reach its determined destiny, if he can prevent it.

Every step is going to be challenged. Notice: "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon" - yes, "to you have I given it" (1:3) - 'but, there will be a battle over it; there will be battle over your possessing what I have given.' Yes, even though God has predestined and pre-determined it, and it is settled in the foreknowledge and forecounsels of God, that does not mean that we are going to come into it willy-nilly! With all the Divine sovereignty, with all the Divine power, and with all the Divine wisdom, associated with the purpose, strangely enough there is a battle over every inch of it. It is like that.

The Spirit and the Inheritance in the New Testament

In the Gospel of John, we read that Jesus said: "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth" (16:13). That is Joshua 5:13-15! The Spirit has come to guide them into all the Truth that is in Jesus (Eph. 4:21) - that is the book of Joshua. When He came on the Day of Pentecost, fulfilling the promise and explanation of the Lord Jesus, He came to guide the Church right into its inheritance. I cannot be too emphatic about this, because there are such inadequate, if not wrong, ideas about the Holy Spirit and Pentecost, and so on. Let us understand that the Holy Spirit came for no lesser purpose than to take the Church right on into all its inheritance in Christ. And if our ideas of the Holy Spirit are not poised and directed along this line, we are - if not arresting - at least in measure subverting the work of the Holy Spirit, and the purpose of His coming. The Church has to be brought into that inheritance for which it has been eternally predestined by God; and the Spirit came - in type in Joshua, in reality in Acts - for that one purpose. And this is going to be a conflict which will not end, until the Lamb has overcome in finality.

In the book of the Acts, then, the Holy Spirit does take over in the matter of the inheritance; and He takes over for the conflict of the inheritance. We do not move far into that book before we find the conflict is on. In Jerusalem - whether from Jewish leaders, who kill Stephen; or from the rulers of the pagan world, who kill James and imprison Peter - there it is; the conflict is on. But the mighty Spirit is with the Church in the conflict. He has linked Himself up with that instrument for the great purpose of God. And, when you consider the incidents, and what seem like the tragedies, and look through them, there is a sense in which it can be said, concerning this union of the Holy Spirit with a vessel here on this earth, that 'no man hath been able to stand before it all the days of its life' (Josh. 1:5). There is a sense in which that is true. There has been a withstanding from men and from demons, awful withstanding: but the Church has gone on; the testimony has never ceased in the earth. Even when sometimes it seems to have been driven

underground, it comes up and goes on again. Acts, then, sees the Holy Spirit coming, uniting Himself with the instrument, the vessel, and the conflict arising.

When you pass over to the Letter to the Hebrews, you find yourself once more in this battle. For here it is all about the inheritance, spiritually. The Spirit is here, urging the Church, urging the believers to go on, to go on; not to go back, not to stand still, but to go on. The writer points out that Joshua did not bring the people into God's rest (Heb. 4:8). It was type, it was figure, but that final fulness of Christ was never entered into under Joshua. But Jesus, and the Holy Spirit - they are going to bring the Church into the final fulness.

When we come to the book of the Revelation, we find that the whole issue of the inheritance has now resolved itself into a matter of 'overcomers'. However we interpret the book of the Revelation - whether as applying to the whole dispensation or to the end of the dispensation - the situation that we find is that the Church as a whole has not gone on. A very large proportion of the Church has either declined, fallen back or away, or has stood still in this matter. Perhaps the conflict has been too fierce, the cost too great, the world too attractive, sin too subtle; but there it is. As we find at the end of the book of Joshua, that the enemy was not finally cast out (for we have the tragedy of the book of Judges): so, in the last book of the Bible, in the Revelation, we find that the enemy has not been fully and finally worsted. He still has territory amidst the people of God. And so, there arises the whole question of the 'overcomers'. The 'overcomer' company, or body, is that which will go on and will satisfy the Lord in the whole matter of His full thought.

All this, surely, indicates our own position. For we are in the dispensation of the counterpart of the book of Joshua: in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit whose one inclusive purpose is to bring God's people into fulness - all, that is, who will be led into that fulness; all who will go on. Not a 'select', an arbitrarily selected company, but all who will. Paul's great word as to his own praying and striving was: "that we may present every man complete in Christ" (Col. 1:28) - every man. It is God's thought for us all. Do not say: 'That applies to some good, large people, who have spiritual capacity and are of a different make-up from what I am.' No, 'every man complete in Christ' - that is God's purpose. If the Holy Spirit gets His way, if He gets His ground - we have to see perhaps later what that is - He can do it with every man.

"Be Strong"

Now, it is because of such a tremendous withstanding, all round, of any kind of real progress towards God's end, that you have this threefold reiteration to Joshua: "Be strong, and of a good courage... be strong... be strong..." (vv. 6,7,9). That is our side. And it is just in that connection, as he is bringing into view the cosmic forces, 'the principalities and powers', that are set against the Church and its inheritance, that Paul uses those words. "Be strong in the Lord" he says (Eph. 6:10); 'be strong... be strong!'

There must be no weakening; there must be no letting go. The discouragements will be many; the heartbreaks will be many; perhaps the disappointments will be many. The situation will sometimes seem to be impossible, the prospect a hopeless one. But you and I have got to heed this word, for so much hangs upon it. For ourselves, the inheritance in fulness hangs upon this "Be strong": no weakening, no letting go, no letting down. But it may be that those who will be strong can be a strength to others, and therefore for the sake of others a responsibility is laid upon us to be strong. It is not only for ourselves - it is vocational to be strong.

'I Am With Thee'

And then: "The Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (v. 9). Do not take that out of its context. The context is, that the "whithersoever thou goest" must be in relation to God's full purpose. He cannot be 'with' you on any other ground - you cannot count on that promise otherwise. It will not prove true, unless you are right on the line of His full purpose. But when it is so, then He commits Himself: He is with us whithersoever we go. 'I will be with thee; I am with thee.'

(1) In Spiritual Leadership

Do you notice that that is said in this first chapter twice over, in a twofold connection? Firstly, it is in connection with leading this people over the responsibility of spiritual leadership. I emphasize and underline that word 'spiritual'. Do not think of leadership as official. Leadership is not official: you are not made a leader; you are not appointed a leader; you are not given a uniform, or a dress, or a badge with 'Leader' on it! Either you are a leader, or you are not; it is a matter of spiritual quality and strength. And spiritual leadership means that you are exercising an influence on others, to bring them on, to lead them on, into God's full intention for His people. The effect of your life is that others, because of you, are being helped on, drawn on, led on. If you have accepted that responsibility, and are seeking to fulfil it for other lives, then this word: 'I am with thee', is yours.

(2) In Obedience to the Word of God

Then, notice the second connection in which this word occurs: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth" (v. 8). 'Give heed unto it - give heed unto it.' And then: 'I am with thee'. Your whole life must be based upon and governed by the Word of God. You must not be above the Word of God, superior to it; you must not be apart from it. You must be able to substantiate your position by the Word of God: 'Now, does the Word of God say this or that?' Dear friend, the whole question of your inheritance, and of your influence, depends upon whether you adhere to that Word. And sometimes it will not be understanding the Word. But the word is there - it is said; it is said. Don't argue; don't be superior in judgment - it is said...

Oh, that there were more, a good deal more, of this government by the Word of God. That is why we have got to read it, to consider it, to give heed to it. "Observe to do according to all that is written therein", is what it says here. 'Observe to do it.' Are you reading your Bible in order to find out exactly what the Word does say? If the Word of God says: "Children, obey your parents", it says that; don't argue. If the Word of God says: "Husbands, love your wives" - it just says that! Don't say: 'Oh, but... oh, but... oh...' It says that. If the Word of God says: "Wives, be in subjection unto your own husbands" - it says that, and no one can take superior ground to that (Eph. 5:22,25; 6:1). You see what I mean; I am taking things out in order to emphasize this point - 'observe to do'. You will be blessed if you do; if you don't, you will not come into the inheritance, and you will have no sphere of real spiritual ministry. Very big questions are bound up with this.

But the main thing is that, when it is like that, the Lord says: 'I am with thee'. We cannot take that promise - 'I am with thee' - with any assurance, unless we are seeing to it that this Word does not depart from us, that we observe it, to do it. The presence of the Lord, and our entering into our possessions in Christ, are both governed by this thing. Do read your Bible to see what it really does say - not what your interpretation is, but what it says. Of course there is a great deal fuller meaning in all the Scripture than we have seen, and we shall get more and more light upon it. But, first of all - What does it say, what does it say? Am I in line with that? Big things hang upon that.

"As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage... This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth... observe to do..."

This is why the Holy Spirit came. This is the ground upon which the Spirit is with us. And this is the purpose that the Holy Spirit has taken up in His coming. He has taken over; and, in all the conflict, in all the suffering, He is sufficient to see us through.

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