

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

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Not One Word Has Failed Joshua 23:14

The theme of possession in the book of Joshua hinges upon obedience to the revealed purposes of God. The long awaited possession of the Promised Land had taken place according to the promises of God. In fact, it could be said, that the possession of the land was precisely linked to the word of the Lord. Joshua mentions this in verse 14. There has been no failure on the part of God. Not one word had failed. Everything that God promised to do for His people had come to pass.

The assurance of the faithfulness of God to accomplish what He promised is connected to the assurance that God will bring certain judgment upon His people should they depart from His ways (23:15, 16). Warning against disobedience and apostasy is always linked to blessing and obedience. If Israel will obey God, then God will bless them. If Israel will disobey God, then God will judge them.

The New Testament echoes this theme over and over again. The apostles, who wrote Holy Scripture, under inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, always, accept a person on the basis of their profession of faith, yet if that profession is not backed up by life, then the words are assumed to be false or hypocritical or sinful. This is what Jesus meant, when He said that we would know false disciples by their fruit. It was not so much a lack of fruit that was the problem, but the wrong fruit (Matt. 7:16, 20; Luke 6:43, 44; John 15:2). Spiritual possession of the promises of God is a real possession. It is not some airy-fairy vague sentimentality that is feel-good in its essence. No! The promises of God are real, certain and to be enjoyed fully. Possession that is grounded in the promises of God must however, be possessed. It must also be possessed God's way.

Joshua began his career, in reliance on the promises of God to him (1:8). God promised Joshua that if the Book of God's Law remained in him, then good success would follow him wherever he went. Joshua was to be courageous and strong because God had commanded him (1:9). Success is dependent on obedience and faith. If God has said, then we must believe it.

When Joshua ponders the overthrow of Jericho in Joshua 5, he does what any excellent general would do. He considers the enemy's defenses and opposition. He sends in spies to bring him accurate intelligence. On the basis of these things he makes his plans. But God reminds Joshua that he cannot succeed by mere reliance on his plans. He still needs the leading of the Lord. In other words, God does not abandon us when it comes time to take actual possession. Since God's Word is part of God Himself, God will ensure its accomplishment. It is in this vein that the Commander of the Lord's army appears to Joshua (5:13 – 15).

The holiness of God must never be forgotten. In our rush to succeed we forget that the glory is not to be ours, but God's. We need reminding always that we stand on holy ground. This reminds us that we need the Lord. In our struggle against sin, we need the Lord. Victory over sin is through yielding leadership to the Commander. As long as we seek to retain, any vestige of authority over any situation, we will not be doing God's will His way, but our way. God's will must be done in God's way. It was because Joshua yielded that he succeeded. At the end of his life, Joshua could look back and see the way the Lord had fulfilled His word to His people (1:15). Joshua could acknowledge that the Lord had accomplished all good things for His people. Not some of them or a few of them, but all of them.

All of us are prone to idolatry. This does not mean that we go and carve out a statue or image and bow down to it. Idolatry is simply the replacement of God with something else. Our affections are on something or someone else. We esteem whatever that is more than God. We treasure something more highly than God. This was the constant snare that faced Israel, and it is the constant snare that faces us. Idolatry leads to the loss of all the good things that God had promised (1:16). It is possible for us to be missing out on all the good things that God has promised us. We do enjoy untold and innumerable blessings from God that we are probably unaware of. Romans 8:28 (NAS) reminds us that God *causes all things* to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

All of God's promises to us are guaranteed in our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). God calls us to cleanse ourselves because we have the promises of God (2 Cor. 7:1). These promises (2 Cor. 6:16 – 18), are the New Covenant promises (Jer. 31:31 – 34), of which our Lord is the mediator (Heb. 9:15; 12:24). The promises of God are designed to lead us to the holiness of God. As we rely more and more on God's Word and His ways, we become aware of His holiness, and thus we bring holiness to completion in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1). There is nothing quite like focusing on the glory of God and the holiness of God to bring reality sharply into focus before our own eyes.

Joshua knew that good success physically was dependent on good submission spiritually. Submission is never easy to come by. The very meaning of the word can bring out the worst in us, because it is not natural to submit to someone else. We all like to be independent. God wants us to depend first of all on Him.

In Joshua 24:14, Joshua issues a call to Israel to fear the Lord and to serve Him in sincerity and faithfulness. This will mean, he says, putting away those foreign gods that you love. It seems that for 40 years, the remnants of what the parents of these children of Israel worshipped (the gods beyond the River and in Egypt) has stuck with the children. Joshua exhorts them to abandon their idols.

He offers them a choice by including himself in it (24:15 – 23). He tells them that he and his house will serve the Lord, and if the people of Israel want to serve other gods then let them do so. His example is designed to provoke them to turn away from their hankering after those foreign gods and to make the choice deliberately to serve the Lord. The outcome of this final confrontation between Joshua and the people was to make a covenant (24:25).

Faith is the instrument that God provides us to revel in the promises of God. Without faith it is impossible to believe or receive what God has promised. Abraham believed God and everything God had promised him was his. It took time to accomplish just getting an heir, but Abraham never wavered (Rom. 4:20). He believed God.

Complaints are simply the fruit of taking our eyes off God. Israel did this repeatedly in the wilderness and in their history. They refused to believe God. We are called upon to not refuse God who is speaking to us (Heb. 12:25). We must be like Abraham who trusted God in the impossible situation for the impossible to occur. It is not trusting God for the possible so much as for the impossible. With God all things are possible (the impossible things are possible – Mark 10:27).

Do we know in our hearts and souls (Joshua's words) that of all the good things that our Lord has promised, not one of them has failed? Let us not doubt the goodness of God, but in the midst of a frazzled world, let us trust in the inscrutable greatness of God who will do all that He has promised to us in Christ Jesus to whom be the glory forever and ever.