
“Fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God...will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work...of the LORD.” (1 Chronicles 28:20)

Introduction

After subduing the Land of Promise the Israelites gathered around Joshua ((The name Joshua is a variant of the name Hosea, Hoshea and Jesus all of which come from the Hebrew word meaning “salvation” or “to save.”)) to hear his farewell speech before he died (Joshua 24). ((Compare the farewell speech and activities of Joshua to those of Jacob (Genesis 47-50); Moses (Deut. 1-33); Brother of Jared (Ether 6); Lehi (2 Nephi 1-4); and Benjamin (Mosiah 1-6).)) Joshua rehearsed unto them the great things that the Lord had done for them and their forefathers in saving and preserving their lives. He explained that God had saved Abraham from the wicked idolatry of false worship practiced by his fathers. God lead Abraham to the land of Canaan where he multiplied his seed. He then sent a branch of Abraham’s descendants down to Egypt. These descendents, the Israelites, served the Egyptians in bondage for many years until God raised up a deliverer unto them and saved the Israelites with a mighty salvation. God afflicted the Egyptians with great plagues and caused the waters of the Red Sea to part unto the salvation of the Israelites and the destruction of the Egyptians. Joshua then reminded the Israelites of the powerful way in which God delivered the inhabitants and possessions of the land of Canaan (the Promised Land) into the hands of the Israelites. This was a sure witness of God’s grace. They had neither earned it themselves nor deserved it. However, God loved his chosen people and so in his boundless charity he gave them these marvelous blessings. Affirming his charity unto them, giving them blessings that they themselves did not earn, God said:

And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat. (Joshua 24:13)

Joshua then explained to the Israelites what a merciful and gracious God expected of them:

Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. (Joshua 24:14)

God had charitably chosen his people. But he desired that they would choose him and forsake the false idolatry of their fathers. God desired that they manifest that choice by serving him and keeping his commandments. God could have chosen others but it was the tribes of Israel who were to be his peculiar treasure, a treasure refined and purified through covenant obedience.

After Joshua had rehearsed God’s good dealings with the Israelites he extended the invitation for them to covenant with the Lord to serve him and to keep his commandments:

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:15)

The Israelites cried out in unison:

God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods; For the LORD our God, he *it is* that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the

people through whom we passed: And the LORD drove out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land: *therefore* will we also serve the LORD; for he *is* our God. (Joshua 24:16-18)

Then Joshua declared that the people were witnesses unto themselves that they had chosen to serve and worship God. To sanctify and memorialize the experience

Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up...by the sanctuary of the LORD. And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the LORD which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God. (Joshua 24:26-27)

This covenantal scene occurs at the closing stages of the Book of Joshua but underlines the entire purpose of the book—to display the consequences of choosing this day to serve the Lord. A cursory reading may lead us to believe that the Book of Joshua simply recounts the conquest of the Promised Land. However, we have seen by beginning our discussion at the end of the book of Joshua that the purpose of this book is to testify that God will save those who exercise their good courage by choosing to serve the Lord. We now return to the beginning of the book of Joshua and review several examples of faith and salvation.

God Installs a New Prophet/Leader

In Joshua 1, as soon as Moses died God installed Joshua as the new prophet/leader over the Israelites. God then reminded Joshua and the Israelites of the importance of obeying his divine law as revealed through the prophet Moses:

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. (Joshua 1:8)

Essentially this passage is God’s formula for a successful, joyful life. In Book of Mormon terms this promise would read, “If ye keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land.” Choosing first to serve God is the foundation for faithful obedience to his commandments and then additional blessings will flow. As he said unto Joshua God promises us:

I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage...be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it *to* the right hand or *to* the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest...Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God *is* with thee whithersoever thou goest. (Joshua 1:5-9)

It takes great courage and faith to choose to serve God. However, God strengthens those who willingly make and act upon such a life-changing choice. Of course choosing to serve God and covenanting to do so is much more than verbal or ceremonial gestures. That choice is sanctified and sealed unto us through consistent thoughts and actions of righteousness.

Crossing the Jordan

Prior to entering the Land of Promise the children of Israel were camped on the east side of the Jordan. In order to cross into the land the Israelites would have to ford the river. God had previously given command unto Joshua to cross the river, saying

Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give them.
(Joshua 1:2)

Joshua relayed the command unto the leaders of the hosts of Israel:

Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God giveth you to possess it. (Joshua 1:11)

But were there any who refused to follow the words of the Lord spoken through his prophet because they could not foresee how they would cross over the Jordan? The unified response of faith from the children of Israel confirms that they all trusted in the words of the Lord spoken unto them by his servant Joshua. They would be strong and of good courage unto obtaining the miracles and blessings of the Lord. They trusted that the Lord would save them:

And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go. According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the LORD thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses...only be strong and of a good courage. (Joshua 1:16-18)

Trust and faith in the Lord were not the only virtues the children of Israel needed to obtain the blessings of the Lord. They also needed to be spiritually pure before the Lord.

And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the LORD will do wonders among you. (Joshua 3:5)

Like he had done for their forefathers the Lord performed the next day a wondrous miracle in the sight of all of the children of Israel:

And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people; And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,) That the waters which came down from above stood *and* rose up upon an heap...and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, *even* the salt sea, failed, *and* were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan. (Joshua 3:14-17)

Their faith and sanctification had been answered by the Lord in a miraculous work that rivaled the parting of the Red Sea. Joshua explained the purpose of this miracle unto the children of Israel:

And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God *is* among you, and *that* he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. (Joshua 3:10)

This confirmatory testimony served the Israelites well to fortify their courage as they went forth to possess the land which the Lord God had promised unto them. This courage sustained them when they came to the city of Jericho, which we will discuss momentarily.

The Faith and Salvation of a Non-Israelite

Curiously one of the best examples of faithfully and courageously choosing to serve God is that of the harlot Rahab. She was not of the chosen people called Israelites, but rather of the people in the Land of Canaan destined for destruction by the armies of God. Yet when two Israelite messengers came to her city of Jericho and sought refuge and hiding, she freely offered it to them with the testimony:

I know that the LORD hath given you the land...For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt...for the LORD your God, he *is* God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. (Joshua 2:9-11)

She then requested that the Israelite messengers covenant to offer the same preserving grace and kindness unto her and her family that she had shown unto them.

Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token. (Joshua 2:12)

These messengers kept their covenant, saving Rahab and her family before Jericho was destroyed by the invading armies of Israelites. And Rahab was counted among the faithful. Indeed it was through her lineage and posterity that many notable figures of the Bible came into this world such as Boaz (the husband of Ruth), Obed, Jesse, David, Solomon, and Jesus (see Ruth 4:21-22; Matthew 1:5-6, 16).

Jericho Falls

When the Israelites came unto Jericho they chose to serve the Lord by being strong and of good courage. They listened to the voice of his servant Joshua in all things, they remembered the mighty miracle of crossing the Jordan on dry ground and they believed that the Lord would also miraculously deliver the Land of Promise, including the city Jericho, into their hands.

Now the city of Jericho was walled about and the gates were shut fast so that no one could enter or leave. A common military tactic would have been to storm the gates and the walls with overwhelming force until the city fell into their hands. Yet, the Lord had unconventional plans. The city of Jericho would still fall to the Israelites, but it would be on God's terms and on his time table so that the whole earth would know that the Lord is God, the God of the Israelites. ((It was not uncommon for God to use unconventional means to win wars for his people that they might not boast that their own strength had saved them. See for example the story of Gideon and his 300 men who defeated the armies of the Midianites (Judges 7). In the Book of Mormon, Mormon refuses to lead the armies of the Nephites because they boasted and gloried in their own strengths and victories. They were left to their own destruction (see Mormon 3-6).))

The Lord commanded Joshua to encompass the city with all of the men of war led by the Ark of the Covenant and seven priests with seven trumpets of rams' horns. ((Rams and horns were both symbols of power.)) Each day for six days they were to make the circuit around the city. But on the seventh day the Lord commanded

Ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long *blast* with the ram’s horn, *and* when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him. (Joshua 6:4-5)

We have the benefit of hindsight that as the Lord spoke thus it was with the city of Jericho. However the Israelites did not know how history would play out. Nevertheless they were strong and of good courage, trusting that the Lord would indeed fulfill his word even though it may have seemed unlikely that city walls would crumble at the shout of an army. The Israelites obeyed the Lord and fulfilled the commandments exactly as they were asked. And so for six days they made their single circuit around the city and on the seventh they circled the city seven times, the seven priests blew their trumpets seven times and the people raised their voice in unison in a shout, for the Lord had given them the city. Just as God had promised, the walls fell. The city was taken. A foothold in the Land of Promise had been secured through faith, courage, and mighty miracles.

Conclusion

We live in a day when the promises of the Lord are continually before us. In his goodness, charity and grace he has chosen us and given us all things. Now is the time and the day for us to choose him. We can secure the greater blessings of peace and joy by joining with Joshua and his household to choose this day to be strong and of good courage to serve the Lord despite the world around us.