

Joshua 5:10-12 (G.S. Byford) 143775

The Ark and Its Contents, Ark and Its Contents: Ark of God, The

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If we have been enabled in some little measure to apprehend the true spiritual significance of what is set before us in the verses we have been considering, we shall be the more ready to appreciate the divine purpose in the instructions so precisely given to Joshua for their faithful observance by the priests, the Levites, and all the people (or, at least the fighting men), on the occasion of their first conflict with the enemy (Josh. 6).

We must not consider the ark apart from either the things which it contained, or apart from its normal cherubic associations.

It is characteristic of God's early revelation of Himself in the unfolding of His purpose of putting the world to come under the Second man, the Lord Jesus, that the figures or symbols referred to (however indirectly) in the later pages of the Holy Scriptures suppose, for their proper understanding, a full acquaintance with the truth and light connected with their origin. We see the proof of this in the Apocalypse, the closing book of Holy Writ. And when we find, as here, that what had hitherto found a place in the sanctuary of God, is now seen as in the midst of the hosts or armies of Jehovah, there should be no difficulty in understanding the reason.

Does not Josh. 5:10-12 afford a beautiful picture of Christ, in the midst of His people now passed through death and resurrection into the heavenly position, ministering to their blessing and refreshment in every way suited to them? But the blessing was to prepare and strengthen them for the work and conflict before them. For "the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year." It was the only celebration of the passover that was connected with the manna, and the old corn of the land. They had no "manna" in Egypt and no "old corn of the land" in the wilderness (Num. 9). But here Christ in all the fullness of His grace was set before them as the divine provision for their blessing. Christ the paschal lamb, Christ the manna, Christ the old corn of the land; the risen One victorious over death and the grave. "And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes and parched [corn] in the selfsame day" (ver. 11).

Then in the next chapter we read, "And it came to pass, when Joshua had spoken unto the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns passed on before Jehovah, and blew with the trumpets; and the ark of the covenant of Jehovah followed them. And the armed men went before the priests that blew with the trumpets, and the rearward came after the ark" (chap. 6:8, 9). It was now no longer necessary to maintain the measured space of two thousand cubits as in chap. 3:4, for other truths were receiving illustration. Christ was alone in His death, and in resurrection "the firstfruits." Not even could His disciples in the days of His flesh, realize the necessity for either, until the events were accomplished and the Lord opened their understanding (Luke 24:21, 25, 45). It is only when the value of Christ's death and resurrection has been made good in the soul by the power of the Holy Ghost, that we enjoy closeness of intimacy with that blessed One who went alone into death for us, and has become in resurrection "the firstfruits of them that slept." For have we not been "quickened together with Christ, raised up together and made sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"? And if this indeed be true of us before God, everything in walk and testimony should be in consistency with, and depends upon our holding fast, this truth. If John 16:1-8 makes this clear as to fruitbearing, so does Mark 15:20 as clearly for testimony.

In this daily procession compassing the doomed city, God was instructing His people in faith, endurance, and dependence upon Himself. It was also an excellent discipline for Joshua and Caleb, who had never doubted the sufficiency of God's power to bring them in and to overcome their enemies. "And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it" (Num. 13:30). Now that they were actually in the land, the sword must wait upon the word. "Ye shall not shout.... until the day that I bid you shout." Patience must have its perfect work, and Israel must learn that power belongeth unto God. Moses in Deuteronomy had warned them again and again of that spirit of self confidence to which he knew they were prone. Sometimes, as in the case of Samson, God was pleased to make use of human strength, but then it must be used in Nazarite consecration to God; for we see that no sooner was the secret surrendered to the enemy, than power departed from Samson, and he became as any other man.

More frequently, however, God was pleased to work for the deliverance of His people in such a way as to humble the pride of man— "lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me" (Judg. 7:2).

Here was then a perfect testimony in the full power of consecration (the seven trumpets of rams' horns) to the right of Jehovah, as "Lord of all the earth," to give the land of Canaan to whomsoever He would. This testimony was in its duration synonymous with the seven days' feast of unleavened bread which followed the passover of which they had just partaken. It was maintained by those who had access to God in the sanctuary, who offered whole burnt offerings upon God's altar, and who burned, incense before the veil. It was a testimony which increased in intensity and earnestness as the execution of judgment drew nigh. It produced no apparent results, but we may well believe that its repetition drew forth ridicule and abuse, and emboldened the guilty citizens of Jericho in their senseless opposition to God and His people. Every trumpet blast shortened the time of respite, and brought judgment nearer. When that full and perfect testimony to the rights of Jehovah over all the earth had sounded for the last time, then every barrier to judgment was withdrawn. God withdrew the restraint He had placed upon His people, gave permission to strike, and the work of destruction was completed. We cannot doubt that the mercy extended to Rahah and her family would also have been extended to any or all who should have submitted to the righteous judgment of God. There was the opportunity at any moment during that solemn week, of submission to Israel's God, and of finding mercy at His hands.

All this bears a close analogy to the present day of grace, but with this important difference—neither mercy, nor repentance were preached to the men of Jericho. But now both are in presentation. The Lord's servants who would maintain in the power of the Holy Ghost a testimony to Christ dead and risen, are required to walk in holiness of life and consecration of heart—to eschew all that savors of mere worldly wisdom, and to maintain a spirit of constant dependence upon God. He who has committed to His servants the ministry of reconciliation, requires that there should be faithfulness in its exercise (2 Cor. 5:18-20). God is glorified thereby, the name of the Lord Jesus is magnified, the righteousness of God revealed, grace presented, and sinners saved eternally. The Israelites were not required to make a precedent of what took place in connection with the destruction of Jericho. So far from this, we learn how, at a later day, the people sinned grievously in bringing the ark upon the field of battle when they were discomfited by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4). It witnessed indeed to the low moral condition of the people, and to the shameful indifference of the priests to the holiness of the God who dwelt amongst them. The ark had become to them an object of superstitious regard. The truth was lost. An idol would have answered their purpose as well. How different the spirit of such an one as David, who gave himself no rest until he had connected himself and his kingdom with God by means of the ark! “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

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(concluded from p. 220)

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