

“Receiving God’s Promises”

Joshua 11:16-23

*God’s promises are received when His people live
in the reality that God is faithful.*

*Conquer Doubt with Action
Live in God’s Strength
Enjoy Rest in the Lord*

Conquer Doubt with Action

Joshua 11:16-19, NKJV

Thus Joshua took all this land: the mountain country, all the South, all the land of Goshen, the lowland, and the Jordan plain—the mountains of Israel and its lowlands, from Mount Halak and the ascent to Seir, even as far as Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He captured all their kings, and struck them down and killed them. Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. All the others they took in battle.

God has continually called His people to do what they cannot do in themselves, but easily accomplish in His strength and with His resources. Numbers 13-14 demonstrate the anxiety felt by the people of Israel when they stood on the border of the Promised Land and the challenges which that entailed. They were afraid for their children and women being taken as slaves and the men completely slaughtered by the powerful people of the land God was calling them into. They forgot that the Lord had already proclaimed the battle was not in their hands but in His since He would fight on their behalf (Exodus 23:27-30).

The unwillingness of the people to trust in the promises of God and their fear prevented the generation who came out of Egypt so dramatically to wander in the wilderness for forty years so that generation would die off (Numbers 14:31-34). The generation who came out of Egypt saw the power of God destroy the Egyptian military might in one moment with the closing of the Red Sea upon them (Exodus 14:26-28). The plagues of Egypt demonstrated God’s superiority over the gods the people in Egypt worshiped (Exodus 7:14-12:30). They saw the ability of the Lord to supply for their physical needs with the manna, quail, and water from the rock as they wandered in the wilderness (Exodus 16:1-17:7).

The Lord has always been faithful to all His promises, even when His children act in ways He did not command them to act. The perfect example of this is seen in God’s promise to Abram to make a great nation from his children (Genesis 12:1-3). The impatience of Abram and Sarai and their attempt to make the promises of God happen in their timing and understanding brought about the birth of Ishmael (Genesis 16:1-16). Yet, God prospered Ishmael and made him into a great nation because of His promise to Abram (Genesis 21:8-13).

The promises of God are guaranteed by His character. God proclaims truth about Himself through Balaam when he prophesied, *“God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”* (Numbers 23:19, NKJV). King Solomon also proclaimed to the people of God, *“Blessed be the Lord, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses”* (1 Kings 8:56, NKJV). The Lord answers those who would proclaim that He is slow or unconcerned about fulfilling His promises through the Apostle Peter when he was inspired to write, *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9, NKJV)

The difficulty with the promises of God is that people need to act on the promises before they actually see any physical evidence of them. Gideon was told to go fight the Midianites with only three hundred men on the word of the Lord that he would be successful (Judges 7:15-18). Moses was called to bring the people of God out of Egypt. When Moses asked God how will he know that the Lord was actually calling him to do this he was told, *“...And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain”* (Exodus 3:12, NKJV). It was not until Moses had completed what God had called and equipped him to do that He would have the complete assurance that God was truly with him through it all.

People are used to having promises broken by those who make them and the ones they make themselves. One reason for this is people make promises that they cannot keep. Telling someone else they will always be there for another person is unrealistic because of the frailties of people and their inability to be everywhere at once. God is the only one who has made that promise who can actually fulfill it to those He has promised it to. God commands those who trust in Him to, *“Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand”* (Isaiah 41:10, NKJV). Jesus has also promised the Church that, *“...I am with you always, even to the end of the age”* (Matthew 28:20, NKJV).

The people of Israel had to cross over the Jordan River and engage the people of the Promised Land in battle in order to see the promises of God become a reality in their lives. The same is true for the Church. The promises of God are only understood as they are lived upon as fact before evidence of that fact is seen. It is often described as walking in faith. Faith as defined by God is found in Hebrews 11:1 which identifies it as things that are not currently seen, but that are assured of because God is faithful. Those who trusted the promises of God in faith gave a good testimony because they proved God's faithfulness in living as if they were facts before they were seen or experienced. This is what those who Joshua led into the Promised Land did and were able to overcome the people of the land by, because they believed what God had promised.

God fulfilled what He had promised because they acted upon it in spite of their fears, doubts, and lack of understanding as to how the Lord would work it all out. How could they possibly defeat giants? They cut them off from the mountains and completely destroyed them (Joshua 11:21). This would have been impossible if they never engaged

the Anakim in battle. God had hardened the heart of the people possessing the Promised Land so they could be destroyed by Israel just as he hardened the heart of Pharaoh to chase after the people of God so they, Egypt, and all the people would know that God is the Lord (Exodus 14:4; Joshua 11:20).

The disciples of Jesus when they were sent out by Christ to preach, heal, and cast out demons would only know the truth about what they were given the ability to do as they acted upon what Jesus commanded them to do (Luke 9:1-6). The same is true of the Church today. Christ has called us to go out and make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). This commission is meant for all who place their faith in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. It is a call to be answered rather than an option to be chosen. Every believer is responsible for having someone disciple them and teaching someone else to be a disciple. Parents are to be teaching their children to be disciples. Those who know Christ are to be introducing others who do not know Him to Jesus. Those who know Christ as Lord of their lives are to be teaching those who are new in their faith about what it means to walk in the Spirit rather than in the flesh. Everyone can and needs to have someone speak into their lives as well as taking the opportunity to speak into the lives of others.

None of this is based upon a person's abilities or perfection, but on being submissive to the call of God upon their life and resting in the strength, wisdom, and resources that the Lord supplies. When God is taken at His Word, the promises of God are seen vividly by those who live them out and by those who are around them.

Live in God's Strength

Joshua 11:20-22, NKJV

For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might utterly destroy them, and that they might receive no mercy, but that He might destroy them, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

And at that time Joshua came and cut off the Anakim from the mountains: from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel; Joshua utterly destroyed them with their cities. None of the Anakim were left in the land of the children of Israel; they remained only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod.

Living in the strength of the Lord is something that has no guarantees ahead of time. It is only after a person begins walking in the Spirit of God that they will discover He has provided the strength to accomplish what He has called them to do. People's desire to have guarantees of success before doing something is based on mistrust, not trust. Proclaiming the need of assurances indicates the mistrust of the one making the promise to fulfill what is being said. This is not the same as seeking confirmation about the call of God as Gideon did during the time of the Judges when God called him to rescue the people from the oppression of the Midianites (Judges 6:11-12). Rather, this is more like the disbelief and questioning of Zacharias at the announcement of John the Baptist's birth (Luke 1:11-20).

The people of God had to be faithful to walk in the direction and way the Lord has called them to walk. God commanded the Israelites to cross the Jordan River and engage the people of Canaan in battle. The Lord supplied assurance that He would be doing the

fighting on their behalf (Joshua 5:13-14). The people of Canaan were more than ready to defend their land. Scripture says that, “...it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle...” (Joshua 11:20, NKJV). The idea that God would harden a person’s heart in order to have them do things that would lead to their destruction is a difficult idea for many people, especially when they have unbiblical beliefs about God.

The Hebrew word that is rendered “hardened” in this portion of Scripture is *hāzaq* which is a verb meaning to be strong, to strengthen, to be courageous, to overpower according to the Baker and Carpenter’s *The Complete WordStudy Dictionary: Old Testament* 2003). It is the idea of overpowering which is the main idea in this text and all those places where God is attributed with hardening the hearts of His enemies. God is bringing judgment upon the Canaanites for their atrocities of worshiping idols and refusing to submit to the one true God (Leviticus 18:24-29). The Lord had valid reasons and was justified in overpowering the people of the land. They had corrupted His creation, refused to acknowledge Him as Creator, and rejected the truth which brought about their destruction.

Israel encountered a people who were frightened and desperate to keep possession of their homes, land, and way of life that they had enjoyed. It would be like cornering a wild animal who fears for its life. This is dangerous because the animal will attack viciously to protect itself and its young even to the point of sacrificing itself in order to remove the threat that has come against it. These feelings were made even stronger by the fact of God imposing fear upon them of His people and the accounts of their miraculous deliverance from Egypt. If there ever was a time when the people needed to live and fight in the strength of the Lord, it was during this time.

Living in the strength of the Lord is something that is needed by all believers in all circumstances. Jesus made it clear that those who followed Him could do nothing without Him (John 15:5). The mission given to the apostles and the Church is completely beyond the ability of any person to do in their strength and understanding without the moving of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christ’s followers (2 Corinthians 3:4-6). Such complete dependency upon God is questioned and denied by most of God’s people in their actions and stubbornness to do what they want instead of seeking the will of God for their lives. This was certainly the issue for the Israelites when coming against the people of the Promised Land to take it over.

The strength of God is something that is revealed as the people of God are obedient to His call. The Israelites had the promise of God that they would overcome the people of Canaan, but in order to realize that, they had to attack the Anakim who were giants. Imagine a whole army of soldiers who are nine feet (2.74 meters) to thirteen feet (3.96 meters) in height coming against the Israelites who averaged anywhere from five feet (1.52 meters) to six feet (1.82 meters) tall. It is no wonder the spies Moses sent into the land felt like grasshoppers before the inhabitants of the Promised Land (Numbers 13:31-33). Yet, the people needed to go in the strength of the Lord and engage the people of the land with the peace of knowing they would conquer them even before they started fighting. This is the same attitude which the body of Christ needs to have presently as well.

Living for God rather than self in this fallen world can be intimidating to say the least. Standing upon the truth of God is difficult because people will often violently reject

truth. Living by the ethics of heaven where the means of accomplishing a specific goal is as important as the goal itself in a world that sees methods of achieving anything as meaningless as long as the desired outcome is realized. Scripture explains all this to those who are Christ's disciples time and time again that following Him would cause them problems externally with the world and internally with themselves due to the corruption of the human heart by sin (John 3:19-20, 15:18-16:4; Romans 7:21-25; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12-14).

No one can follow Christ or live by the Spirit in their strength and understanding. God has provided all that His people need to accomplish this as they live in His strength rather than their strength. Many things are promised to those who love God and follow in the footsteps of Christ in submission to the Spirit of God. When this is done, the promises of God are made evident and clear to the one who trusts in the Lord, but also to those who are around the child of God. When people choose to live in the strength of the Lord they will also enjoy rest in Him as well.

Enjoy Rest in the Lord

Joshua 11:23, NKJV

So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had said to Moses; and Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Then the land rested from war.

Rest is a concept in many first world countries that is foreign. The pace of life and the pressure to achieve is often so great that people feel rest is a luxury they simply cannot afford. Those in less developed countries are much more accustomed to rest since climate, cultural values, and political atmosphere make it impossible to avoid times of rest. It should be pointed out that this is not physical rest exclusively, but trust in things beyond their understanding rather than in their own strength and abilities.

People will often put their trust in things, people, and false deities because it is strictly based upon what they can personally understand. The gods worshiped around the world are things of nature, different animals, and creations of people's own imaginations and superstitions rather than fact and truth.

The Israelites could not have done in their own strength the feats they had accomplished. It did not matter how firmly they believed in themselves or trusted in their skills of warfare what they were encountering in coming against the people living in Canaan was insurmountable in their own strength. They had to rest in the Lord and trust in His ability to accomplish what He said He would do. Each time they went out in the strength of the Lord they discovered they could rest in the Lord because He was found faithful to His promises to fight on their behalf.

Many people assume the worst of God rather than trusting in His sovereignty and trusting that He is righteous and just in all things which He does in the lives of all people, including their own. The rest God promises in Him cannot be known until those who seek His rest choose to trust that God is perfect in all His ways. There is a tendency to continually question what God does that makes people uncomfortable in their minds. The promises of God are true in His Word about blessings and curses. The children of Israel were commanded to be obedient or the destruction which God was bringing upon

the people of Canaan through them would be the same fate they would suffer if they did not obey (Deuteronomy 28:1-68).

The promises of God are faithful and true. Obedience brings blessing and disobedience brings curses no matter if you belong to God or not. There is only one standard and there are no exemptions. No one gets a free-pass so to speak with God but are called to trust the Lord in all things. Therefore, resting in the Lord means complete reliance upon Him, submission to His commandments without question, and trust in His Word in spite of any apprehensions that is felt. God does not call people to choose Him as one of the places they turn to in order to receive comfort and rest from or in, but that He alone would be their only place of rest and comfort.

The Israelites came to receive the promise of God to bring them into a land that was prosperous and abundant and to enjoy homes they did not build and eat from vines they had not planted (Deuteronomy 6:10-15). Resting in the fulfillment of God's promises ought to be started before the reality of those promises are known by the one who believes on Christ for salvation. Jesus made it clear that He is preparing a place for everyone who trusts in Him in heaven (John 14:1-4). God has promised, "*...those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint*" (Isaiah 40:31, NKJV). These promises can be understood and experienced in the present when people choose to rest in the Lord now.

The Church, all individuals who are trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, is to rest in the promises of God on the authority of His Word by the presence of the Holy Spirit living within them as a guarantee of the promises the Lord has made. This rest is often questioned because trials and heartaches are seen as God's failure to keep or fulfill His promises. The breakdown is never with the promises of God, but the lack of trust in Him and unwillingness to accept His will over desires of a person's heart. The restlessness of those claiming Christ as their Savior and Lord is just that simple. God is sovereign over all things and knows best in all situations, while mankind is limited in their understanding and powerless to even control themselves let alone things in creation or other people.

There is peace in resting in the ability of God and His righteousness. The Israelites enjoyed a time of peace at the conclusion of the war against the nations that were living in the land the Lord had promised them. The land enjoyed peace at the end of the time of war because the people of God were faithful to the leading and empowering of the Spirit of God upon them as His people. The body of Christ, the Church, should be rejoicing and resting in the Lord presently, even now as the world is in bitter chaos in their rebellion against the established order of God in creation.

If rest in the Lord is something that alludes the child of God, they must be sure they are trusting in the Lord as they ought to and believing He will be faithful to the promises He has made in His Word to those who trust in Him. Entering into the rest of God begins with accepting the Lord is faithful and living in the reality of all His promises presently rather than as if they were something that possibly might not happen. There is no need for a "back-up plan" just in case God does not show up or do what He has promised to do. Contingency plans need to be in place for all human promises because of their lack of ability, knowledge of the future, and sinfulness. No such plans are needed with God since He alone is all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present.

All this about God can be confirmed without doubt in the life of the person who trusts God in all circumstances and with their physical lives. Are you enjoying rest in the Lord, living in His strength, and conquering doubt by acting on the promises of God in your daily routine? If not, now is a great time to repent and begin trusting the Lord as He calls His people to trust Him. If you are experiencing the promises of God, be bolder for Him in all that you do, say, and think so you can loudly proclaim the faithfulness of the promises of God to a world who is unknowingly dying in their sins.