

THE STRONG RECOGNITION OF THE LORD'S FAITHFULNESS

JOSHUA 21:43–45

Introduction

Murder is a capital crime, a very serious offense. Killing people is a violation of the sanctity of life. The most valuable asset a person has is life itself, his own life. Therefore, to take a person's life is to steal the most prized possession he has. The *sanctity of life* cannot be over-stressed. For this reason, murder is a capital offense and is subject to the most severe penalty under law.

But there is a difference between deliberate, premeditated murder and accidental, unintentional murder (manslaughter). A man who intentionally kills a person with malice and forethought differs from a man who is sawing a tree that falls and kills a person. Being guilty of killing a person by accident is far less condemnable than killing someone deliberately with premeditation. For this reason, the penalty for deliberate murder needs to be different than for accidental, unintentional murder.

Long ago, years before the Israelites ever crossed the Jordan River to enter the promised land, God had instructed His people to make special provision for the person who committed accidental murder. He also charged His people to make special provision for the ministers of God. These are the subjects of this important passage of Scripture: *The Cities of Refuge and the Special Cities for the Levites: A Picture of Christ Our Refuge and of Ministers Being Willingly Provided For*, Joshua 20:1-21:45.

- I. The cities of refuge were set aside: a picture of Christ who shelters us from judgment (vv. 1-9).
- II. The special cities for the Levites (ministers) were claimed: a picture of strong zeal and faith in claiming God's promises (ch. 21, vv. 1-2).
- III. The cities for the priests were assigned: a picture of the people willingly and abundantly providing for the ministers of God (vv. 3-42).
- IV. The strong recognition of the LORD's faithfulness (vv. 43-45).

Joshua 21:43–45 The Strong Recognition of the LORD's Faithfulness

These verses conclude the inheritance of the promised land received by the Israelites. Note the focus of the verses: the strong recognition of the LORD's faithfulness. He is the subject in each of the verses, being mentioned two times in verse 44.

1. The LORD Himself gave His people their inheritance in the promised land (v. 43). The promised land was His to give. It was His inheritance; He could give it and divide it as He wished. Just as an earthly father often gives his inheritance to family or charitable institutions, so it is with God. God gives the inheritance of the promised land to His dear people, to those who believe and follow Him, supporting Him and His
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cause. Beginning with Abraham, God had promised that He would give the promised land to Abraham and his descendants — if they would just believe and obey His commandments (see notes, Gen 12:1-3. Also see Gen 24:7; 26:3; 50:24; Num 11:12; 14:16, 23; Deut 1:8, 35; 6:10) (Marten H. Woudstra. *The Book of Joshua*, p. 314.)

At long last, a generation of Abraham's descendants had proven faithful in following God and obeying Him. And the result was wonderful: they received the inheritance of the promised land. God proved to be trustworthy, true to His Word. God gave this faithful generation of Israelites, the descendants of Abraham, the promised inheritance. The great inheritance first promised to Abraham had been divided among his descendants. God had proven faithful.

2. The Lord gave His people rest — physical and spiritual rest, rest of body and heart (v. 44). The idea of spiritual rest is rich and full of meaning. Remember, the Israelites had always been pilgrims and sojourners on this earth, wandering about from place to place. They owned no land; consequently, they could not build homes nor farm crops for produce to eat, buy or sell. They had even been slaves in Egypt for about 400 years. And ever since their deliverance from slavery, they had been wandering about, living in tents, constantly having to break camp and move from place to place, never able to settle down and have a permanent residence. They had no permanent home, no permanent land, no permanent place to call their own. As stated, they were pilgrims and sojourners, wandering over the face of the earth with no permanent place to settle.

But despite being temporary residents upon the earth, the Israelites had one great thing: the hope of the promised land — the hope of God's rest. God had promised them *His rest*, rest of body and rest of spirit. God's promised rest meant receiving the inheritance of the promised land and being able to settle down, no longer moving about as pilgrims upon this earth. God's rest meant having a permanent home, being free from the hardships, trials and temptations of the wilderness wanderings. It meant no longer having to go without water and food, but having plenty to drink and eat. It meant having a land with an abundance of milk and honey and all other provisions necessary for life. God's rest meant having purpose, meaning and significance in life, a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction, of peace, security and protection — the provision of everything a person would need. Simply stated, God's rest meant the victorious life that knows God's care and provision, presence and guidance day by day.

Note what the verse says: the LORD Himself gave His people rest, physical and spiritual rest, rest of body and of heart. God was faithful in providing rest to His dear people — All the enemies had been conquered and the people now had their own land upon which they could settle and experience the day-to-day rest and guidance, peace and provision of God. (See notes, 1:10-15; 11:23, pt. 5; 14:15; 21:44, pt. 2; 22-4; 23:1-2).

3. God gave His dear people a victorious life. He helped them conquer all their enemies. In fact, He Himself delivered all their enemies over to them (v. 44). God's people

had now gained control of the promised land. They had defeated the great southern alliance and the mighty northern alliance of enemies that had tried to keep them out of the promised land (see notes, Josh 10:1-43; 11:1-12:24). Not a single enemy was now able to form a strong coalition against the people of God. The land had been brought under their control. The LORD had been faithful and had empowered His people to conquer all their enemies. No enemy remained, not an enemy of significant power — all because of God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness had given His people victory.

4. The LORD fulfilled every good promise He had made to Israel. Not a single promise failed (v. 45). Every promise was kept and fulfilled. God was faithful.

Thought 1. The LORD was faithful to the Israelites. He fulfilled every promise He ever made to them. This tells us something: the LORD will be faithful to us. He will keep His Word to us, fulfilling every promise He has ever made to us.

- (1) The LORD will give us the inheritance He has promised. And the inheritance is of more value than all the wealth and riches of this world.

Mat 16:26 *"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

Mat 6:20 *"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal."*

Mat 19:21 *Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

Luke 12:33 *"Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys."*

Acts 20:32 *"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."*

Acts 26:18 *To open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.*

Rom 8:16-17 *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit, that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

Gal 3:26-29 *So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

Col 1:12 *Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.*

1 Pet 1:3-4 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade kept in heaven for you.*

(2) The LORD will give us *His rest*, the rest of God Himself. He will give us both physical and spiritual rest, rest of body and of heart. For us, God's rest means living the victorious life, conquering all the enemies that face us as we walk day by day, the enemies that try to defeat and destroy us, that try to keep us from living a conquering, victorious life. *God's rest* means peace of heart and mind, a sense of purpose, meaning and significance. It means possessing a sense of deep fulfilment and satisfaction in life. It means confidence and assurance. It is having God's guidance and care. It is knowing that God's presence and guidance are with us moment by moment, day by day. *God's rest* is experiencing the fullness of life and having absolute assurance of living eternally with God. This is the rest that God promises to give us. And God is faithful to fulfil His promises.

Mat 5:6 *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."*

Mat 11:28-29 *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."*

John 4:10 *Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."*

John 4:14 *"But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

John 6:35 *Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."*

John 6:51 *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."*

John 7:37-39 *On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."*

Heb 3:18-19 *And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.*

Heb 4:1-3 *Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"*

Heb 4:9-11 *There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.*

Rev 7:17 *For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

Rev 14:13 *Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labour; for their deeds will follow them."*

Rev 22:17 *The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.*

Exo 33:14 *The LORD replied, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."*

Psa 17:15 *And I — in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.*

Psa 107:9 *For he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.*

Psa 116:7 *Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you.*

Isa 28:12 *To whom he said, "This is the resting place, let the weary rest;" and, "This is the place of repose" — but they would not listen.*

Isa 55:1 *Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.*

Isa 58:11 *The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.*

(3) The LORD will give us a victorious life, helping us to conquer all the enemies that confront us and try to keep us out of the promised land of God. A victorious, conquering life over all enemies is the promise of God. And God is faithful to fulfil His promises.

Psa 44:5 *Through you we push back our enemies; through your name we trample our foes.*

Luke 21:18 *"But not a hair of your head will perish."*

Rom 8:35, 37-39 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?....No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Rom 10:13 *For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

Eph 6:10-13 *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*

1 Tim 6:11-12 *But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

1 Pet 5:8-10 *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*

2 Pet 2:9 *If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

1 John 5:4-5 *For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

Exo 14:14 *The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.*

Exo 23:27 *I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run.*

2 Chr 16:9 *For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war.*

2 Chr 32:8 *With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles.*

Psa 34:7 *The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.*

(4) The LORD will fulfil every good promise He has made to us. Not a single promise will ever fail.

Mat 5:18 *"I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."*

Luke 21:33 *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."*

1 Cor 1:9 *God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.*

2 Th 3:3 *But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.*

Heb 2:17 *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

Heb 10:23 *Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*

1 Pet 4:19 *So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.*

Rev 1:5 *And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.*

Deut 7:9 *Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.*

1 Kng 8:56 *Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses.*

Psa 36:5 *"Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies."*

Psa 146:5-10 *Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God. He is the maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them — he remains faithful forever. He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, The LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD. ■*