

CROSSING THE JORDAN

Joshua 3-4

WESTEND BIBLE CHAPEL

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Page | 1

Chapters 3 & 4 of Joshua detail the children of Israel after decades of wandering in the wilderness crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land.

In this narrative the words “crossing over” is used 21 times. It marks a transition in their lives. It indicates an arrival in which they had been preparing for over forty years. It implies the entrance to a new beginning.

The “cross over” required a new faith experience to occupy the new land God had in store for them. The time had come to cross over and take over. To cross over and take possession of the possessions God had promised them.

Technically, for the Christian, it marks the end of the self-empowered Christian life and the beginning of the Christ-empowered life. It represents the end of a life lived on the principle of trying to please God with our own efforts, and the beginning of a life lived on the principle of faith, dependency, and obedience to God.

Crossing our Jordan speaks of our entering into a fuller experience with Christ. The believer who has ceased to long for a fuller experience of the riches of God has ceased to grow in grace.

That is the kind of Christian who is saved by grace but is still in the wilderness, “the land of discouragement, disobedience and defeat” in his Christian experience. He wanders, as they

wandered, because of unbelief in the power and the promises of God.

The Promised Land represents the “land of spiritual blessing” that God has promised us. It is available for us to experience and enjoy because of our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:3 says that believers are *“blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ.”* Our spiritual Promised Land, called “the heavenlies,” is the sphere of our spiritual blessings in Christ, right here, right now (Ephesians 1:3-14), for every single believer.

Crossing the Jordan and entering Canaan, the Promised Land, is not equivalent to entering Heaven. That is a misconception. There are no enemies in heaven; there are no wars in Heaven, there is no loss of life in Heaven.

The “heavenlies” is not our heavenly home of the future. It is the “realm of our spiritual experience” now. The “heavenlies”, our Promised Land, our Canaan consists of blessings and battles.

Being victorious in spiritual warfare is just as much a part of Christian maturity as enjoying our spiritual blessings in Christ.

And all the blessings of our “promised land” are guaranteed to us for the taking - but we must take them!

If we are not appreciating or enjoying our spiritual blessings in Christ (such as assurance of salvation and a joyful, meaningful purpose in life), perhaps we have never crossed the Jordan.

Maybe we are still stuck in the “wilderness” of discouragement and defeat because we have not committed ourselves to fully obey the Lord.

We must claim our spiritual blessings by “crossing the Jordan” and living in the full enjoyment of our spiritual position in Christ.

Now let us turn to the story and commit the understanding of it to God by prayer:

Our Father and the father of our Lord Jesus, may you give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that we may know you more through the study of this important OT story. I pray that you enlighten the eyes of our heart, in order that we may know the hope we have been called to, the glorious riches that are ours in Christ, and His great incomparable power for us who believe.

I pray that you take us all to higher ground, to new spiritual levels, especially when we find ourselves at the crossroads of life. In times of transition, when things seem difficult and impossible, such as crossing a mighty Jordan, grant us the serenity and courage to step out in faith as you open the way for us to cross over into new territory.

Give us the strength and wisdom to fight the good fight of faith, making us both overcomers and victorious when we struggle with unseen evil forces around us. Amen in the name of Jesus!

Today’s simple 3-point outline:

- Preparing for the crossing
- Completing the crossing
- Remembering the crossing

PREPARING FOR THE CROSSING

Looking to the Lord v3

When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it.

Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.

Up until this time, during their time in the wilderness, the Hebrews followed the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. These two divinely instituted symbols now have been removed.

The Ark of the Covenant takes the place of the daily cloud and the nightly fire. The ark symbolized God's presence and power. It was the sign that God was leading them. They were to keep their eyes fastened on the ark when priests held it during the crossing.

If we are to move confidently into new situations, we need to keep our eyes fixed on the Lord. Each one of us must have a clear, personal view of the Lord Jesus. We must follow him. He knows the way. He sees the road farther ahead than we could possibly ever see. He goes through our Jordans before us.

Heb. 12:2 *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.*

And for this reason, we deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Jesus. We follow Jesus by obeying His law.

1 John 3:22....*and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.*

Purifying Ourselves v5

Joshua told the people, *“Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.”*

Whenever we face new opportunities, God tells us *“Consecrate yourselves”* (Josh. 3:5). Then and now God calls his people to holiness, purity, and separation. For the Israelites on the edge of the Jordan, this meant washing themselves with water and abstaining from sexual relationships. For 3 days they set themselves apart and waited on God to receive instructions.

It is a law in the spiritual kingdom of God that if God is to be glorified through us, He must first be sanctified in us.

Lev.10:3 *Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored.”*

A holy God must have holy instruments for the accomplishing of his wonders among men. Purification gets our soul in a position to be used by God.

2 Cor 7:1 *let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

Isaiah 52:11 *Touch no unclean thing. Come out from it and be pure.*

For us today, it means that we should come afresh to be cleansed by the precious blood of Jesus, which never loses its power and can continually wash away every sin.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1 :9).

The people had to keep 3000 feet from the priests who carried the ark of the Lord. They were not to go near it (v4).

There were two reasons for this. The *first*, is so that all the people *could see the ark and understand God was leading them, and*

secondly, because of the sacredness of the ark, they were to show great reverence for it, by not going close to it.

COMPLETING THE CROSSING

Listening to God's Instructions v9

Joshua said to the Israelites, *“Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God.* V9

Often in our excitement, either from joy or worry, when undertaking new ventures, we fail to slow down and hear from God. We want to rush in, get busy, and move ahead. But, like Joshua instructed the people of Israel (v. 9), we need first to stop and to listen.

We live in a fast-paced, hurry-up world. If the devil can keep us busy and, in a hurry, half his battle is won. We need to slow down and tune in to God. We need to hear from him.

Do not expect to hear from Him if you do not read His word daily. To the contrary, you will hear much from the devil. The devil does not stop speaking to us through the media: the radio, the TV, the magazines and newspapers and the net. He speaks through politicians and false preachers, and everyone who does not know Christ personally.

But God speaks through His word and through His own! When you find yourself at a crossroad, or in a time of transition, do not move, unless you have heard from God. He is able to tell you when to make the move and how to make it. Do not move ahead of Him. You must go before you. He must allow Him to give the directives, so the crossing can be timely and smooth.

Joshua 1:8

meditate on the Book of the Law, day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful

Expecting God's Involvement

Man's extremities are God's opportunities. The Israelites were at their wits end. The Jordan was overflowing. It was at its highest level. An impossible situation stared them in the face. There is no way they could not cross over by themselves. They were desperate. They were stuck. And that is exactly what God permitted, so that they might be more dependant on Him and realize more deeply how utterly helpless they were.

The Lord often waits to be gracious for to us. He first allows our circumstances to become critical, even desperate at times, before he appears on our behalf.

God choose the time of the crossing when the river was at its highest to demonstrate his power! God never performs a miracle without a purpose. This miracle set the stage for the Israelites to take possession of the Promised Land.

This miracle showed that God keeps his promises. The transitions of life cannot hide our faces from God. The transitions of life cannot change the purposes of God. The transitions of life cannot destroy the child of God. The transitions in life are designed to bring greater glory to God and greater good and blessings to us.

Moving Out in Faith

The command from God came to Joshua to organize the people in a straight, processional line behind the Ark of the Covenant and march directly toward the raging waters. And somewhere along the way God would intervene.

And as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap, while the water flowing down to the Dead Sea was completely cut off, so, the people crossed over opposite to Jericho (v15-17).

We must get our feet wet, by stepping out in faith, if we wait to see the Lord work on our behalf.

The crossing was a crossing done by faith. No fear gripped their souls. They had great faith that the heaped-up waters would not start flowing while they made the crossing. They were not fearful of being washed away unto death as was the case for the Egyptians at the Red Sea., They trusted God with their lives.

God honored their faith and their obedience to His instructions, by miraculously parting the waters.

The Red Sea was divided in two. And a crossing on dry ground was provided, between the two walls of water standing still on each side.

At the Jordan, the scene was different. Water flowing downstream from north stopped flowing. Far back near a city called Adam the waters piled up as a heap. Like a dam. And the river drained away into the Dead Sea in the south. There were not two great walls of water standing still on each side of the passage prepared.

Red Sea was a going out, an exodus. The Israelites were saved from slavery and bondage.

Jordan River was a going in. They were saved for blessing. They were to enter the land, to conquer and possess it.

For the Christian, the leaving Egypt speaks of a release from the world, from sin and Satan. While Canaan speaks of the

overcoming life in which the believer learns to possess his possessions, his riches “in Christ”.

REMEMBERING THE CROSSING

Looking Back Through Memorials

When the whole nation had finished crossing over, the Lord said to Joshua, *“Choose 12 men from the people, one from each tribe, and tell them to take up 12 stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood to carry them over with you and out them down at the place where you will stay tonight (4:1-2).*

Then we are told Joshua set up another set of 12 stones (which were taken from the land) at the same spot the where the priests had stood in the middle of the Jordan. They remain there to this day, hidden in the riverbed.

12 stones out, 12 stones in.

Two sets of memorials. The piled stones on the other side of the Jordan would serve as a witness to future generations as a reminder of the awesome power of God displayed during the crossing of the nation. They were erected there as a perpetual memorial.

You know the Jordan River represents death and the Ark symbolized Christ entering the floodwaters of death with His people. The 12 stones which were submerged in the waters and hidden there, represents our being united with Him in His death. The 12 stones, taken out and piled up on land at Gilgal, represent our union with Christ in His resurrection.

Red Sea is about redemption –Christ dying for us. That is salvation! The Jordan River is about us dying with Christ. That is union!

Pondering God’s Faithfulness

Vs 23-24 *for the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever."*

When inquiring about those visible memorials, the following generations would be educated by them. They abided as an enduring sermon in stone.

The generations to come would be reminded about God’s power and goodness exercised on their behalf. They would learn to trust Him as the promise keeping God. They would also learn to fear their God all their days.

The discipline of remembrance is so important.

V14 *on that day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they revered him all the days of his life, just as they had revered Moses.* Joshua was about 80 years when he was confirmed as the new leader of the nation.

Conclusion

God wants to see all His children enjoying the “abundant life” (John 10:10.) He wants us to “fight the good fight” (1 Timothy 6:12) and “stand firm” in spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:14).

These blessings and promises are all part of living in the promised land of the “heavenlies” - but they can only be enjoyed and experienced by Christians who are willing to cross the Jordan, as they maintain sanctified lives, step out in faith, and see God do the impossible.

Positionally, all heavenly blessings are ours.

Experientially all heavenly blessings are to be appropriated.

2675