

PASSING INTO THE NEW YEAR

Joshua 3:1-11

INTRODUCTION

- Most people prefer to choose what they know and see to what is unknown and unseen
- There is a great fear in the hearts of men to the unknown future
- In their desperation to know the future, people will turn to fortune tellers, experts, computer modelling, etc.
- None of these are safe or reliable guides for the future
- The only trustworthy guide for the future is the only One who knows the future – the Almighty God
- The children of Israel were about to pass into the Promised Land
- After forty years in the wilderness, the previously unbelieving generation were gone and it was now time to possess the land
- The familiarity of the Sinai Peninsula was to now make way for the unknown of Canaan
- They only knew a little of what was there – milk, honey, grapes, strong walled cities and giants (Numbers 13:26-29)
- As they entered the unknown, God would ensure they entered the right way so that they would be prosperous and victorious, and not fail and be defeated
- In the same way, as we enter 2023, we only know a little of what lies before us – it is largely unknown to us
- The people of this world will stumble blindly into the new year with fear and uncertainty, wholly unprepared for the events that are coming
- But God's people are not so – while we are not shown all the details of the future, God has equipped us to enter the unknown future prepared for all that will befall us

How must we enter the unknown of 2023?

I. WITH A REVERENTIAL PRIORITY OF SPIRIT (1-4)

- A. Joshua demonstrates the soberness and watchfulness needed
 - 1. He rose early in the morning (v.1)
 - 2. God's saints have always shown their devotion to God by rising early to commune with him (Genesis 22:3; Mark 1:35)
 - 3. Knowing the hour and the eternal realities at stake, we ought to be urgent in our work for the Lord (Psalm 119:60; Ephesians 5:16)

- B. The ark was to go before the people (v.4)
 - 1. Previously the ark was in the midst of the people
 - 2. There was to be a space of 2000 cubits (900m) between the ark and the people
 - 3. There were possibly 2 million Israelites and this distance would have allowed the whole nation to view the ark descending before them to the flooded river Jordan
 - 4. God was to be first and everything else was to follow
 - 5. In the same way, in 2023, if we are to enter the year for God, we must deny ourselves, our wants and desires, and seek God first in all things (Matthew 6:33)
 - 6. All we do must be for his glory (1 Corinthians 10:31)

II. WITH A RESOLVE TO PURITY OF SANCTIFICATION (5)

- A. They were not to cross Jordan before they sanctified themselves
 - 1. To be sanctified is to be set apart from sin unto God
 - 2. The word is closely related to "holy" and "saint"
 - 3. God's will for his people is they be sanctified (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

4. God's purpose for every believer is that we be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29)
5. God's goal for us is not *happiness* but *holiness* (1 Peter 1:15-16)
6. The vessels God uses in his work in the world are not the unclean and impure but the sanctified (2 Timothy 2:19-21)
7. While modern day "Christianity" strives to imitate the world in order to "win" the world, we are commanded to "be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2)
8. On New Year's Day especially, believers should not imitate the world in their revelling and lasciviousness, but rather devote it to self-examination, confession of sin, and resolve to walk in holiness in the coming year

III. RULED BY THE PRECEPTS OF SCRIPTURE (9)

A. We must "come hither"

1. God calls us apart from the temptations of the world, from the business of our lives to commune with him through his word
2. Like Nathanael, we need to find our "fig tree" where each day we can have quiet meditation upon the Scriptures

B. We must hear the words of the LORD our God

1. God has been gracious to us in providing us a lamp and light to illuminate the dark path before us (Psalm 119:105)
2. We do well to take heed to it (2 Peter 1:19)
3. It is not enough to merely hear the words, we must be *doers* also (Matthew 7:24-27; James 1:22)
4. The children of Israel would soon enter fierce conflict with those who rejected God's word and worshipped other gods

5. As we enter the new year with new experiences and new acquaintances, we must realise that if we go forth with God's word it will provoke their hostility
 - a. Joseph discovered this in Egypt
 - b. Daniel discovered this in Babylon
6. But ultimately God's blessing rests on those who read, hear and keep the words of the Bible (Revelation 1:3)

CONCLUSION

1. The ark of the covenant – God's presence, his laws, his covenant
2. As Israel entered Canaan with the ark, so we must enter 2023 dependent on God's presence with us, obedient to his word and resting on his covenant promises
3. *How solemn is the reflection that with a new cycle of time commences, with each traveler to Zion, a new and untrodden path. New events in his history will transpire--new scenes in the panorama of life will unfold--new phases of character will develop--new temptations will assail--new duties will devolve--new trials will be experienced--new sorrows will be felt--new friendships will be formed--and new mercies will be bestowed. How truly may it be said of the pilgrim, journeying through the wilderness to his eternal home, as he stands upon the threshold of this untried period of his existence, pondering the unknown and uncertain future, "You have not passed this way before" (Octavius Winslow)*
4. This year may bring many blessings into our lives – good health, financial prosperity, new friends, births, marriages
5. This year may bring many trials into our lives – sickness, disease, poverty, enemies, relationship breakdown, death
6. Yet for the Christian whose trust is in God, even the darkest river of death is turned to a blessing
7. *"I do in the beginning of this New Year solemnly make a fresh surrender of myself, my whole self, body, soul, and spirit, to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, my Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, covenanting and promising, not in any strength of my own, for I am very weak, but in the strength of the grace of Jesus Christ, that I will endeavour this year to stand complete in the Will of God." (Matthew Henry)*