

Israel Crosses the Jordan Into Canaan

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Israel crosses the Jordan river as a nation into Canaan, following the Lord into the land
2. aim – to cause us to see that, in Christ, we too cross a water barrier to never go back
3. passage – Joshua 3:1-17

b. outline

1. Instructions for Crossing the Jordan (Joshua 3:1-6)
2. Hearing from God Before Crossing the Jordan (Joshua 3:7-13)
3. Crossing the Jordan (Joshua 3:14-17)

c. opening

1. the **process** of this pericope
 - a. the entire chapter belongs to a single pericope – it has *much detail*, but it is a *single story*
 1. like **chap. 2**: the entire chapter encapsulates a story unto itself
 - b. and (**again**), due to its length, I will not read the entirety of the chapter up front
2. the **place** of this pericope
 - a. this chapter picks up the narrative begun in **chap. 1 – chap. 2** (Rahab and the spies) is an *insertion*
 1. **i.e.** in **chap. 1**, the people *prepare* to cross the Jordan; now in **chap. 3** they *actually do*
 2. **IMO**: the events of chap. 2 occur just before (or during) the three days of preparation called for in **chap. 1** – possibly as a *covert operation* by Joshua himself
 - b. so, in this chapter, we continue the story that we left off in **chap. 1** ...

I. Instructions for Crossing the Jordan (Joshua 3:1-6)

Content

a. the journey from Shittim (v. 1)

1. Joshua “*rose early in the morning*” = the morning of the day after the preparation called for in **1:11**
 - a. the people are camped in Gilead, the *extended* Jordan valley, to the E of the river, across from (“*opposite*”; **v. 16**) Jericho – the area is called *Shittim* (**3:1 cf. 2:1**) – **i.e.** just NE of the Dead Sea
 - b. they were given three days to pack up their belongings and get ready to go (**1:11**) – **3:1** is a reference (**probably!**) to the early morning of the *fourth* day – three days of prep, now time to go
2. so, the people travel (**in v. 1**) from a *dispersed area* to a *small area* at the very edge of the river
 - a. because they will all travel across the river *at the same point*, they will need to “crowd together” at that location – so they move E from a large area to the edge of the river at the crossing point

b. the instructions of the officers (vv. 2-4)

1. **note**: *another* three days elapse (**see v. 2a**) = either a) the amount of time needed for a dispersed people to gather together at the river’s edge, or b) just another time of preparation for crossing
2. the officers give the instruction that the people are to follow the ark across the river
 - a. when the Levitical priests go down to the river with the ark, they are to follow them
 - b. but, they are to keep a distance of about 2,000 cubits from the ark (**i.e.** 3,000 feet; about ½ mile)
 1. (**implied**) because the ark is holy, the people are to keep their distance from it
 2. (**stated**) because they need to see the ark in the distance (have not “*passed this way before*”)
 - a. **i.e.** the ark represents *the presence of God* – the ark going before the people implies that *God is leading the people across the river* – he is going “before” the people into Canaan
 - b. therefore, the people need to *see* the ark at all times – they are following God, and need to “see” him (symbolically) as he goes ahead of them, so they don’t get “lost”
 - c. **IOW**: the people aren’t just following “the guy in front of them” – they are *all* following God

c. the instructions of Joshua (vv. 5-6)

1. **to the people** (**v. 5**): “*consecrate*” yourselves = set yourselves *apart* to this task; set your *mind* on the things of God; put away *anything* that distracts you from what God is going to do *around you*
 - a. **e.g. (last week)** we are to *consecrate* ourselves *and the Sabbath Day* to worship = we are to put aside anything that would *distract* us (sinfully or otherwise) from the pure worship of God
 - b. **here**: the Israelites are to *focus* on what God is going to do – not to be distracted by the *mundane* such that they lose “sight” of the *true meaning* of what is about to take place

- c. **IOW:** the Lord will “do wonders among you” = this is more than just a “river crossing” – this is the beginning of a **new phase of Israelite history, and you are about to be a part of it ...**
 - 1. **BTW:** the “do wonders” piece is explained in a bit ... (see below)
 - 2. **Phase Four** = 1) the patriarchs (the *Promise*); 2) Egypt (the *Development*); 3) Sinai and the wandering (the *Nationalization*); (**now**) 4) entering into Canaan (the *Settling*)
 - 2. **e.g.** a *birth narrative*: conception (promise) → *in vitro* (Egypt) → birth (Exodus) → in the world
- 2. **to the priests (v. 6):** “take up the ark” = take up the *symbol* of God’s holy presence as he *leads*
 - a. **Joshua 3** is the beginning of a whole new phase of Israelite history – the *former times* are past, and the people are to prepare and follow God as *he himself* leads them into their future

II. Hearing from God Before Crossing the Jordan (Joshua 3:7-13)

Content

a. Joshua hears from God (vv. 7-8)

- 1. the statement by God in **v. 7** continues the commissioning of **1:5-9**
 - a. **before:** “no man shall be able to stand before you” = I have set you as the leader over Israel
 - 1. **now:** “today I will begin to exalt you” = you will now step forward to lead the people
 - b. **before:** “just as I was with Moses” = just as I used Moses to lead the people of Israel
 - 1. **now:** “as I was with Moses” = you will now become my instrument leading Israel into Canaan
 - c. **IOW:** it is time for Joshua to assume his role as the leader of Israel in their new phase of existence
- 2. but ... God’s statement in **v. 7** belies something now *directly said* in **v. 8** ...
 - a. God tells Joshua to instruct *the priests* to carry the ark down to the river and “stand still” in it
 - 1. **i.e.** the priests will take the ark down to the river, enter a *few feet* into it (only!), and wait for God to do what he has planned to do (see below)
 - 2. **i.e.** it will be the *priests* who will cause the miraculous work of God to be, *not Joshua*
 - b. **truth: although Joshua has been commissioned by God to be the next leader of Israel, he will not possess the same kind of relationship that Moses had with God**
 - 1. **e.g.** Moses led across the Red Sea – now, the priests and the *ark* will lead across the Jordan
 - a. **note:** nowhere in this text does it say *where* Joshua was *in* the parade – **i.e.** we can assume that he followed close behind the ark before the people, *but he is not out front*
 - b. **IOW:** God *himself* will go before the people across the river into Canaan
 - 2. **i.e.** the kind of relationship Joshua has with Yahweh will be different from Moses’ *intimate* and *direct* communication with God *and Moses’ position in Scripture as God’s prophet*

b. Joshua speaks for God (vv. 9-13)

- 1. the message from Joshua: here’s **how you will know** that God will give you this land ...
 - a. **vv. 9-11:** although you *know* that you must face (and displace!) many enemies (**note the list**), *what you are about to experience* will prove that it is God who will drive them out of the land
 - b. **v. 12:** so, set aside a *designated man* from each tribe to act as a *memorial builder*
 - 1. **note:** the *reason* for these men will not be made clear until **chap. 4**, after they have crossed
 - c. **v. 13:** watch, for when the priests enter the water of the river, it will stop flowing
 - 1. **note:** the parenthetical note of **v. 15** is important *here*: the Israelites have arrived at the Jordan *at flood stage*, at a time when the river is greatly *swollen* from winter rains
 - a. it is usually easily fordable; it is now wide, deep, and fast-running (**i.e.** dangerous to cross)
 - b. **e.g.** like the difference between the Mississippi at its mouth in MN vs. its mouth in LA
 - 2. God will stop the waters of the river N of their location (at Adam; **v. 16**) so that the people can cross on “dry ground” (**IOW:** God “parts” the Jordan *just as he parted the Red Sea*)
- 2. **Joshua 3** is the beginning of a whole new phase of Israelite history – the *former times* are past, and the people are about to *experience (again!)* the power of God, which will *assure them into the future*

III. Crossing the Jordan (Joshua 3:14-17)

Content

a. the people cross the Jordan

- 1. the author portrays the event with **special significance** (**i.e.** he includes each detail promised above)
 - a. the priests come to the “brink” of the river with the ark and stand in the water
 - b. the water flowing from the N is stopped (“beside Zarethan”), and the water below continues flowing down into the Dead Sea (the “Sea of Arabah” or the “Salt Sea”) until the plain is emptied
 - c. the people then cross the Jordan plain on “dry ground” (miraculously or simply uncovered)
- 2. the author portrays this event **as a parallel** to the crossing of the Red Sea – **another water barrier**

b. the people cross the barrier into their new phase of existence

1. **question:** why does God bring the people around to the NE (through Edom and Moab) to wind up facing a dangerous “barrier” before they can enter into Canaan (**i.e.** a river at flood stage)?
 - a. **IOW:** why doesn't he just bring them straight N from the Sinai wilderness through the Negev and into Canaan from the S (to the W of the Dead Sea), with limited barriers standing in their way?
2. **reason #1: to show this generation his power** in the *same way* he did the previous generation
 - a. the previous generation had passed through the Red Sea, and saw the mighty power of God
 1. unfortunately, they *squandered* that vision by rebelling against him, so he “ended” them
 2. this generation, then, in passing through the Jordan *in similar fashion* sees the same power
 1. hopefully, they will *understand* both the *actual power* of God over nature and the *symbolic* action of God leading them through it as a **deep assurance** of his leadership over the natives
 2. **e.g.** the circumcision ritual of **Joshua 5:2-9** is *direct statement* of this truth
3. **reason #2: to close a chapter in the history of Israel** with the message of **no going back**
 - a. the previous phase (in Egypt) was closed by crossing the Red Sea – it was a *symbolic message* to the people that there was *no going back* (although they often *threatened* to)
 - b. the previous phase (in Sinai) was closed by crossing the Jordan – it was a *symbolic message* for the people to now begin their *new life in Canaan* (to settle in their *promised home*)
 - c. **IOW:** God uses a *water barrier* as a symbolic message that there is no “going back” to living in the wilderness, eating manna, being insulated from all enemies, and just letting God “do the work”
 1. **e.g.** the manna ends in **Joshua 5:13**, shortly after they arrive on the other side

c. the metaphorical nature of this barrier to the later people of God

1. **question:** is there any event in the life of a follower of Christ in which he “passes through” water as *symbolic* of a new phase of life (**IOW:** is there any event in the life of God's people where he uses *water* as a way for them to testify to a new life, an old life now being done away with)?
2. **answer:** it is through **baptism**, immersion in water as a *testimony* to dying with Christ and being raised with him to new life, in which the Christian *metaphorically* passes through a “barrier”
 - a. **note:** we do not draw this symbolism *directly* from this narrative; it is a *metaphor only* for us (**i.e.** be careful not to develop your theology from *narratives*, but only from didactic Scripture)
 1. the symbolism “comes home” in **Jesus' baptism in this river**
 - b. **i.e.** like God *miraculously* parting the waters before the Israelites, so the Spirit *miraculously* raises believers from the dead in regeneration and faith to bring them to this phase of existence
 - b. **i.e.** and, like Israel passing through two (2) water barriers to begin new phases of their existence, so believers pass through baptism to start anew by testifying “there is no going back”
 1. another reason why the **Baptist** view of *immersion* is so important to its *symbolism* ...
 - c. **the days of slavery (to sin) and wandering (in darkness) are past, and now comes a time of Conquest – the conquest of the remaining enemies in the flesh in our sanctification**
 - d. **i.e.** there is no “going back” – there is only “going forward” **in the power of God**