

Joshua Chapter 3

This is the chapter that describes the actual crossing of the river Jordan. Forty years earlier, Moses had led the people out of Egypt by the way of the Red Sea. God had opened up the waters of the sea to let them pass through on dry land. In I Corinthians chapter 10, the Red Sea is used by Paul as a type of baptism. "They were baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea". Following Moses into the sea was an evidence of their commitment to their leader. They had left Egypt behind them. On either side of them were the mountains. The only way for them was forwards, but that meant crossing the sea. That is why it is a perfect picture of the commitment Christians make in baptism to the Lord Jesus. We cannot go backwards into the world, we cannot turn aside: the only way is forwards with Christ.

The river Jordan, on the other hand, is often seen as a picture of death and resurrection. I suppose this is best seen by the two piles of stones that were to be erected in chapters 4 and 5. One pile was left in the river where the waters would soon submerge it – the other was erected on dry land on the other shore.

The signal for the people to move forwards towards the river was to be the movement of the ark. I believe the ark means a lot of things typically to us today

1. The evidence of the divine presence with them
2. The uniqueness of the person of Christ
3. An object to be observed
4. An object to be followed

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1. The divine presence

The ark is the symbol of God's presence amongst His people. God said of the ark that there He would commune with them from between the cherubim that covered the ark. It is described as the ark of the covenant of the Lord. It was the seal of that covenant that God had first made with Abraham regarding the land, and later repeated to Isaac, Jacob, Moses. And Joshua.

2. The uniqueness of Christ

Joshua three tells us that the ark was to move 2,000 cubits or 3,000 feet, or 1,000 yards ahead of the people. From a purely practical point, I suppose it was far more easily seen by the people. It was to be kept distinct from them, illustrating the uniqueness of the Person of Christ. While He was Immanuel, God with His people, He was always unique and distinct from them.

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1. The Lord as a child

When the Lord was just a child, we read of Him in Matthew chapter 2. In verses 13,14, 20, and 21 we read of "the young child and His mother". Religious men speak of the Madonna and child, but the Bible always puts Him first, even as a young child. Even in nature we would speak of the "mother and child". When announcing the birth of a child, we would read, "Mother and child both well". But He must always have the pre-eminence.

2. The marriage of the Lamb

In Revelation 19, we read of the marriage of the Lamb, not the marriage of the Bride. We speak of course of the wedding day as the Bride's big day. But in the Bible, the marriage was His big day – it is the marriage of the Lamb. He must always be first.

3. The mount of transfiguration

On the holy mount, the Lord is with two great men, Moses and Elijah. They are speaking, but God says to Peter, "This is my beloved Son...hear ye Him". Moses and Elijah were great men in Israel's history, but their conversation was only about Him.

4. The heavenly places

In Ephesians chapter 1, we are so blessed of God that we are said to be seated in heavenly places. This is a wonderful place of honour for us. The same is also said of Christ, He also is in the heavenly places, but of Him only are the words added, "At the right hand of God".

So here in Joshua chapter 3, the ark is 2000 cubits apart.

3. The ark to be kept under observation

We can think of many scriptures which speaks of Christ as being the focus of attention for His people.

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1. The forerunner

In Hebrews 6:20, He is the forerunner. The end of verse 19 speaks about the veil, "whither the forerunner is for us entered". He makes it possible for us to enter the immediate presence of God as worshippers.

2. He has sanctified Himself

In John chapter 17, the Lord says of His own, "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified through the truth". Sanctify means to set apart. The Lord when He ascended back to heaven set Himself apart as an object outside of this world. It corresponds with Colossians – "Set your affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God".

3. In resurrection

The Lord is the firstborn among the dead. In I Corinthians, He is the first-fruits of them that sleep. He has entered into death, but

then He rose again. In Revelation chapter 1, He says, "I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore". In Hebrews chapter 2, there were those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage". But He has gone into death for us, I Thess 5 says that He "died for us".

4. A Person to be followed

In Hebrews 2:10, He is described as "the captain of their salvation". The word "captain" means literally the "file leader". He is the One who leads the way through the wilderness. In I Peter 2:21, He has left us an example that we should follow His steps.

As the ark moved forward, the Lord said to Joshua in verse 7, "This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee". This last phrase is a repeat of what the Lord had said to Joshua in chapter 1:5. "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee". Joshua had received the promise personally, but now all Israel was to see the proof of it in the crossing of the Jordan.

In verse 10, Joshua widens the scope of this event that is about to take place. It was to prove to them that the living God was amongst them, and that He would drive out from before them all the inhabitants of the land. Notice it is "the living God". In verse 11, He is "the Lord of all the earth". He is not just the God of Israel, but Lord of all the earth, whether the world recognises this fact or not.

In verse 12, Joshua tells the people to look out a man from each of the twelve tribes. There is nothing more said about them in chapter 3 but we read about them and the twelve stones in chapter 4, verses 2 and 3.

There is one last comment to be made about the river itself. "The Jordan overfloweth all his banks at the time of harvest". It was naturally speaking the worst time of the year to cross the river. If God does a thing then there is no circumstance on earth that is too hard for Him.