

Joshua: Crossing the Jordan

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

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In our earlier studies in the Book of Joshua we have begun to notice that there are a number of themes which are important for us to try and grasp if we are to understand what this book is essentially about.

The first is that when God makes His covenant promises He always keeps them. He had promised to give these people a land flowing with milk and honey, which in plain language means that it is a land fit for kings to live in. And He is in the process of fulfilling that covenant promise. That is a principle that is operative today. Whatever God has promised, He will perform.

Secondly, He calls His people to covenant faithfulness. I've written about this a little in the bulletin. Technically, the covenant that God makes is bilateral: it has promises, but it also has stipulations. These are not stipulations of the sort that say: if you will be obedient, God will bless you. No, they of the sort: because has blessed you, this is how you show this to be the case. If they are to live in a land fit for kings then they must live like kings who are fit for such a land. And so from the beginning of the book and we see this note struck here in chapters 3 and 4, the people of God are to listen to and be obedient to everything that the Lord says to them.

Third, the God who keeps His covenant promises and calls His people to covenant faithfulness, intends to employ Joshua as the instrument by which these promises are going to be fulfilled. And this brings us to notice something that will help us as we read through Joshua that we have not yet noticed: that this central character, Joshua whom God has appointed as the leader of the people, Joshua the son of Nun, has been renamed in order that he may fulfill the particular ministry God has for him to do. Nun, his father, did not give him the name Joshua. The name that was given to him, presumably at his circumcision, was the name "Hoshea" which means salvation (Numb 13:16). And it was only as Joshua had begun to demonstrate to Moses that he was the Lord's appointed man in bringing the people of God into the land, that Moses said, your name will no longer be Hoshea (which means salvation) but Joshua (which means the Lord is salvation" or "The Lord is the Savior"). There is no doubt as we read this story from the vantage point of new covenant fulfillment in Jesus Christ, that change of name has far greater significance than it would have been apparent to Moses

and Joshua. That change of name was an indication that in Joshua, God was going to demonstrate to His people a pattern of salvation which He would bring to its final example only in the person of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. You may recall Matthew says, in Matthew 1:21, Jesus was called "Jesus" or "Joshua" because He would save His people from their sins. And there can be no doubt that in the broad picture the reason why Moses changed his name from Hoshea to Joshua is because he has a sense in what God will do in the ministry of this man, He is giving to His people in Old Testament days an illustration of the way in which God works in the salvation of His people. And that's why we are able to take these great stories and see the pattern of God's working in *those* days as illustrations of the way He continues to work in and through the fullness of His purpose in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now when we come to these particular chapters we come to one of those great transition points in Old Testament history. The people are standing outside of the fulfillment of God's promises. All the blessings of the land flowing with milk and honey lie on the other side of the River Jordan and they have come to a great crisis point, a great decision point. And this is signaled to us by the fact that we are given the date for this event very precisely. We are told in 4:19 that it was the tenth day of the first month that the people crossed the Jordan. And the reason why that day is of particular significance is because it was the very same day forty years before that the people were called to choose the Passover lamb and to begin the great event of the exodus which forty years later would bring them to this significant point.

In a way, forty years previous they had faced the most monumental decision in their nation's history and they had come out of the land, and yet for forty years they had wandered in their disobedience and they had never tasted of the land flowing with milk and honey. Joshua recognizes that God has brought these people back to a great point of decision: will they now take the step of faith that they refused to take in all these previous years? And like all these narrative passages in the Bible, the best way to read it is to think of it like a moving cinema camera, and as it moves through the narrative, the thing to look out for is the place or places it lingers and pauses in the story; or even the places to which the camera may return as though God is saying, I want you to focus on these particular issues. And if you read through the passage in that light, you will note that there are four things to which the camera returns:

1. God bids us to focus on the consecration of the people of God.

Verse 5. "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow..." He says, in order for you to enter the blessings God is giving you it is necessary for you to yield yourselves to God in a fresh and decisive way. You know that the language in the Old Testament for consecration, "sanctify" is language which on the one level suggests separation. But interestingly, on the other hand the idea of "shining." So

that taking those ideas together, it seems to suggest that we give ourselves unreservedly to the Lord in such a way that we separate from the agenda that characterizes the world and as a consequence, we begin to shine. As we give ourselves and walk into His presence, God's own glory begins to reflect itself in us and upon us. As He has given Himself to us, His glory begins to be reflected in our love and devotion to him.

Now what exactly would this have involved? Verse 5? Well, it was probably the same things that had been involved in previous occasions. For example, Exodus 19 when God had said, "consecrate yourselves to Me." And they had done two things, you remember. On the one hand, they had washed their clothes and on the other they had abstained from sexual relationships. Now to us, that may seem as rather odd, but what that command meant was deeply significant. Washing their clothes, for example, was deeply symbolic of removing every vestige of the past, of where they had been, from their lives. And they were even prepared to stop legitimate functions within the bond of the closest relationships in their lives, marriage, and to regard them as secondary to the summons of God. There was no area of their lives they were not prepared to yield up to God and say: "there isn't one aspect that I'm not willing to give to you. Just tell me what it is and I will do it for You." And of course, that's the very thing that Jesus picks up whenever he says that if you are going to be My disciple there must be a decisive rejection of the past and there must even be a willingness to yield up to Me the things that are most precious to you and to which you may feel you have a right and privilege, but you must be prepared to deny everything for My sake and the gospel's. So that even your devotion to father and mother might seem like hatred in comparison with your zeal to give yourself to Me.

Is there an area of your life that you simply refuse to yield up and hand over to Jesus' Lordship? And if so what is it? Don't squirm around this issue but deal honestly with the Lord and tell Him just now what that area is and see it for what it is: a wicked refusal to allow the Lordship of Christ to dominate in your life. Brothers and sisters, consecrate yourself to the Lord. It's the only way to open the floodgates of blessings into your life.

But notice (and this is so very important), notice, the consecration of the people of God is not so much something that qualifies them to get the blessing, as it is the *necessary means of receiving the blessing that God intends to give them*. It isn't, "Lord, if I give myself to You... I'll do some kind of deal with You and get more blessings in my life.". No! God says, "This land, it's yours!" But there is no other way into that land except unreserved consecration to Me.

When you read through this passage you will see that though this idea of consecration is essential it is not the central thing in the passage. The central thing in the passage, you simply cannot miss it, is the presence of the Ark of the covenant of God.

2. God bids us focus, then, on the Ark of the covenant of the Lord.

The Ark of the covenant, was a little box. The size of an ottoman at the end of your bed. It was made under the command of God to be a physical symbol of the presence of God. It was more than that: a physical symbol of the very throne of God. That's why these creatures, the cherubim, were built onto the end of it, covering the mercy seat of gold that was placed on top of the ark. So that it was between the cherubim that God would make Himself known to his people.

The Ark of the covenant was the physical expression to the people of the power of God and presence of God and the purpose of God. That's why Joshua said to the people, that you need keep some distance between yourself and this Ark, not only because the Ark was holy, but so that the people could stand back far enough to keep it in their vision. So that Joshua could say: when you see the Ark moving, move! It's the sign that God Himself is moving. And when the Ark is brought into the River Jordan a kind of repetition takes place of what had taken place 40 years previous at the Red Sea. And they stand, these priests, as they carry this Ark into the waters, and just as the waters fled when Jesus stilled the storm, the waters flee at the presence of the Ark of the covenant. And the author of Joshua is at pains to tell us that the waters were in full flood. God didn't bring them across at the easy time of year, but when it seemed an impossible challenge.

What is the message here? This strange box that is carried by the people through Old Testament history, where God meets with His people, where there is a mercy seat, where they come once a year to pour the blood of sacrifice for the forgiveness of the sins of the people of God? Well, of course our New Testament tells us in detail what this box means. Just as Joshua's experience in leadership is a miniature of the way in which God will bring salvation to His people in Jesus Christ; so this box, the Ark of the covenant of the Lord, which has the mercy seat, and the tables of the law written on tablets of stone in its heart, is a miniature of the true Ark of the covenant, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a display in Old Testament terms, of where men and women have to look in order that they might be brought into the blessings of God's salvation. That's why Hebrews tells us that Moses and Joshua had faith to cross the Red Sea and the Jordan. Now, what you have to do is to fix your eyes on Jesus who is author and finisher of our faith. That is why you are to lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily besets us, as you cross from condemnation to salvation.

There is life for a look at the crucified One;
There is life at this moment for thee;
Then look, sinner, look unto Him and be saved
Unto Him who was nail'd to the tree.

I need to pause and ask you whether you have done that. I need to ask you, "Are

you looking to the Ark of the covenant? Have you crossed over? Do you understand where to look for salvation? Do you understand the One you are to follow in order to enjoy the blessings of salvation?"

3. God bids us focus on exaltation of the servant of God.

3:7; 4:14 Now, I didn't expect that. If our eyes are to be fixed on the glory of God as He leads us to salvation, the last thing we would expect is that we should fix our attention on a human being in all of this. Why? Part of the reason is, of course, is that Joshua is a working model of Jesus. It is a miniature expression of the exaltation of Joshua-Jesus!

There must have been people there who said, "We knew his father!" But something of great significance had happened to Joshua. You remember when the spies had gone out and Joshua and Caleb had said, "We need to go in to the land *now*." And the people were so furious at what Joshua, the Lord is salvation, had said to them and they took up stones to humiliate and kill him. Hundreds of thousands of people were now to say to themselves, "I can recall when this man was humiliated before all Israel, but now God has raised him up and given him a name: the Lord is salvation that is greater than any other name and he's called us to follow him into the promised land." Now, with all our Reformed pedigree and suspicion of reading into the Old Testament things that are not there, do we not have here some kind of foreshadowing, a kind of miniature play being acted out before the eyes and ears of these people that we, with our vantage point are to take up and say: Yes, I see it now. Lord you were telling the story of the gospel in all its beauty and magnificence, clothing it in these historical forms. Even in the Old Testament men and women might catch a glimpse of how God saves: through the exaltation of one He has humiliated.

And, and this too is very important, there is here a pattern of what God does generally in the lives of all those whom He intends to use in His service: generally speaking, they have been marked by the fact that they have been humbled under the mighty hand of God in order that in due season they might be exalted.

One application: the exaltation of Joshua was connected to the blessings of God's people because it is a general principle that where those who lead God's people are not worthy of spiritual respect, the people cannot be led into spiritual blessing. And where their leaders are worthy of spiritual respect but fail to receive it, they will not be the recipients of spiritual blessing. The New Testament brings us to this:

The blessings of the fellowships to which we belong will be tied to the respect-worthiness of those who lead.

What a word that is to those preparing to be leaders in the church of Christ.

4. God bids us focus on the building of a memorial to the work of God.

These twelve stones: one for each tribe. 4:6. Exhibitions of the power of God that would lead generations of men and women yet unborn to cry: "Lord, God of Joshua, show Your power again! Show Your power again!"

Many of us have such monuments. They enable us to recall God's work in our lives or in the lives of others and hopefully in us. Books, records of great revivals, perhaps to look back into the history of the gospel in this great country: "Lord, do it again!"

There is one such standing stone in Glasgow, from the East side of the city, you may gaze up the city acropolis: the stature of man you cannot discern from the road. The inscription reads of the ministry of John Knox and how God turned the country around. "O God, couldn't you do this again?"

You have standing stones? For some of us it is a building where we first met with God for the first time in our lives, where as we recall it now, we want to give ourselves again to the doing of his will and the service of his kingdom. For many of you, I fancy, it may well be this building! But for me it is this:

John Stott *Basic Christianity*

David C. K. Watson *My God is Real*

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