

## **ENTERING THE LAND OF PROMISE**

***- JOSHUA 3:5-17. - OCTOBER 13. -***

**Golden Text: – "He led them out by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation." – Psa. 107:7.**

FINALLY, after appointed officers had directed in the matter of the packing of goods and preparation of victuals for the change of camp, the people of Israel were all ready to enter the land of promise in hope of which they had left Egypt forty years before. The time selected for the entrance was the tenth day of the first month, Nisan (April), originally Abib. It was on this date the Israelites under Moses set out from Egypt for Palestine forty years before.

Viewed from the human standpoint it was a most unfavorable time of the year, because, although it was the harvest time and favorable as respected the crop of the land into which they were entering, nevertheless it was flood time in the Jordan, when the melting of the snows in the Lebanon mountains caused the river Jordan, ordinarily about one hundred feet wide at this place, to overflow its banks for sometimes several hundred feet. And of course its current was swift and dangerous. However, the Israelites had evidently learned something in the forty years of God's dealings with them, and they were therefore prepared for Joshua's announcement that a great miracle was to be wrought, which would demonstrate to them that God was for them and would drive away all fear from their hearts and impress the fear of them upon their enemies.

### **JOSHUA SAID, SANCTIFY YOURSELVES**

We are reminded of a similar instruction given to the Israelites when they approached Mount Sinai at the time of the

giving of the Law Covenant. The word "sanctify" is well known to mean "set apart," and the specific directions given at Mount Sinai show that this meant that they should purify themselves from sin, and in general from all earthly things, and abstain from all except necessary food, with a view to being in the heart condition which would enable them to best appreciate their dealings with the Lord and his personal interest in them. Thus they were prepared to realize that the mercies and favors coming to them were not of accident but of divine providence, and to be strengthened in heart and in faith accordingly.

Profitable lessons may be drawn by Spiritual Israelites from this narrative. For instance, we might think of the entrance into Canaan under the leadership of Joshua as corresponding to the entrance of all who love the Lord into the blessings and privileges of the Millennial Age. In this illustration we might think of Joshua as representing the Lord, and the priests bearing the Ark as representing the little flock, and the passing over of the Israelites as representing the passing of mankind into the new dispensation, where indeed there will be enemies still to be conquered, weaknesses of the flesh still to be overcome, and full possession is to be granted only at the close of the Millennial Kingdom. In this view the Jordan might represent Adamic death, and its being dried up picture the cessation of Adamic death to all those desiring to be the Lord's people and to enter into his favor, while the return of the waters of the Jordan behind the Israelites, shutting them within the land of promise, might represent the Second Death, which would be the portion of any who would renounce the goodly heritage which the Lord has provided for the redeemed world.

But there is another application we may make, also Scriptural, which will be still more forceful in some respects to ourselves of this Gospel Age. We may suppose the people of Israel who accepted Joshua to represent justified believers in Jesus, who

have accepted him as their Pattern and Leader, and who propose to follow where he leads, obeying his commands. We may consider the swollen river Jordan as representing consecration unto death, which is required of those who will become New Creatures in Christ Jesus and heirs of the exceeding great and precious promises. To us consecration means so much and seems so formidable, but under the Lord's guidance and leading all the faithful may quickly cross over and begin by faith a new experience as New Creatures in Christ. From one point of view the consecrated, the sanctified, after having passed from death unto life, from earthly ambitions and joys to heavenly ambitions and pleasures, still find enemies that must be conquered – indeed that their fightings have just begun. Now it is that they must war a good warfare to exterminate the enemies of the New Creation – the weaknesses, the imperfections, the evil attitudes and desires of the old nature, which are yet in conflict with the divine will and law, and which, as the Apostle declares, war against the soul, against the New Creature. Whichever view we take we are to remember that the first command for preparation is, "Sanctify yourselves," and note the fact that God is with you and for you and ready to aid you. But the sanctifying or setting apart to the Lord and his service is not only a condition to the call of the present time, but it will also be a condition necessary to the blessings of the Millennial Age by those then favored of the Lord, for whoever will not separate himself to be the Lord's can have no part nor lot in any of the blessings which God has provided for them that love him.

### **"PASS OVER BEFORE THE PEOPLE"**

We should have in mind that the Israelites were encamped along the eastern side of the river Jordan for several miles, a mighty host. Joshua's directions were that the people should look out for the Ark of the Lord, that it – representing the Lord – would precede them. According to these directions about three-quarters

of a mile intervened between the Ark and the people, it going to the north of them and they following it within that distance. At the proper place it stood, and its bearers, the priests, walked down to the river until their feet touched the water. The Israelites were intently watching what would be the program, and to the [R4063 : page 286] astonishment of all, when the priests' feet touched the water the river began to shrink. Step by step they went onward into the channel, while the river grew smaller and smaller, until it was entirely dried up, and then the Ark rested in the middle of the river-bed, while – according to the directions of Joshua – the people on the bank crossed over quickly into the land of promise. Thus so large a body of people crossed the river quickly, to the surprise and terror of their enemies, who supposed themselves surely safe from an attack behind such a barrier as the swollen Jordan.

But, Do you believe it? some one asks. We could readily see that if the waters above could be made to stand up in a heap a very swift river like the Jordan would speedily empty itself and leave a very dry channel; but what kind of a miracle would this be that would cause the waters of a whole river to stand up in a heap? Many will read the account with unbelief.

Let us who have gotten so many precious things from the Bible learn to not discard any of its presentations lightly, but rather to anticipate that they must be true and seek a reasonable explanation of them. In this case we have not very far to seek, for the account says (v. 16) that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up in this heap, a great way off at Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan. Thus we see that the waters did not pile up within a few feet or a few inches of the priests and the Ark, but that they piled up a great way off. Following this cue, Professor Wright examined the bed of the Jordan some miles above the place of this miracle, and found that near the town of Adam the river passes through a deep gorge, and that a land slide at this point

had probably stopped the river and caused it to form into a lake or a great heap of waters north of the obstruction. Such a cutting off of the waters from above speedily drained the river bed, and the filling of the lake to the level of the obstruction or the giving way of the latter allowed the river to rise again after the Israelites had passed. But some one may say, You are doing away with the miracle altogether. We answer, No! God's miracles are merely the operations of his power in material ways not understood at the time. The matter is none the less to be understood as a miracle, because what overruling power caused the landslide to take place at the particular time when it would begin to affect the current of the river at the moment that the feet of the priests touched the water? The lesson to us is that our God is equal to any emergency, and can use any and all of the forces of nature for the accomplishment of his will. Similarly the fact that we can now account for the flood in Noah's time, as shown in "Scripture Studies," Vol. VI. – that it was the breaking of the last of a series of earth's rings similar to those of Saturn – does not invalidate the thought that the flood was a miracle directed in harmony with the affairs of the world and the divine plan to the very moment. So far from weakening our faith, such interpretations of the miracles of the Bible refresh and strengthen us, and teach us to look for the fulfilment of the promises which relate to the future in marvellous ways known to our God and fully under his power and control. In *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, under the caption of "Jericho," we find an account of a similar damming up of the Jordan in A.D. 1266: –

"A lofty mound which overlooked the river on the west fell into it and dammed it up at a time when the Jordan was in full flood as in Joshua's day. The waters [R4064 : page 286] above spread out into a great lake while the river below ran dry. The dam below held from midnight until the fourth hour of the day."

## **THE LORD WENT BEFORE THEM**

A general lesson is taught by the fact that the Ark preceded and remained in the river-bed until all of the people had passed over. This to them was the Lord's guarantee of the safety of their passage, and the evidence that their privilege and opportunity of thus quickly entering into possession was of the Lord.

A lesson to all Spiritual Israelites should be, "In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:6); and again, "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5); and again, "My help cometh from the Lord" (Psa. 121:2); and again, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13); and again, "All things are yours, for ye are Christ's and Christ is God's." (I Cor. 3:22,23.) Let us in the strength of these divine promises enter into the blessings of the Lord more and more day by day, and allow his leadings past and present to give us courage and fortitude for the future.

"Who led us last will lead us still,  
Be calm and sink into his will."

There was a limited time in which those who had faith and a desire to cross over could do so, after which the passage would be impossible. So with us there is an acceptable time, a day of favor, in which, if we will, we may present our bodies living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God, our reasonable service. We know not how long the Lord will allow this favorable opportunity in any measure to stand open – we know not how soon the number of Elect will be complete. But as many as are of courageous heart should proceed at once to a full consecration and to an entrance by faith upon the new life – as New Creatures. Let us not be deterred by fear of the giants with whom we will be obliged to contend, in fighting against the weaknesses and sin-habits of the old nature. Let us not be discouraged with the thought of the high walls and fortifications of entrenched sin. Let us remember that if

God be for us he is greater than all that could be against us. As the Lord promised the Israelites that he would be with them to drive out before them the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Gergashites, the Amorites and the Jebusites, the proper course for the Israelites would have been to have waged at once a warfare of extermination against these peoples of the land, for this was the divine command. Those people typified the sins with which we must contend earnestly and over which we must have a victory of extermination. For various reasons the Israelites compromised with [R4064 : page 287] their enemies and as a result suffered from them in future years, sometimes being dominated by them.

Similarly Spiritual Israelites who compromise with sins in their own flesh are sure to have difficulty therefrom and to find the battle between the flesh and the spirit sometimes won by the flesh. We are to remember in this connection that the destruction of Israel's enemies did not signify the sending of them to eternal torment. The Lord thus allowed them to be consigned to the prison-house of death to await the Millennial morning and an awakening by the Redeemer from the sleep of death under much more favorable conditions than they had ever previously enjoyed. Their death would mean no disadvantage to them – indeed in some respects it would be much more merciful than a death by wasting disease. We are to remember that these people, like the remainder of the race, were all under death sentence anyway, and that our Lord's declaration is that their wickedness had come to a full, and that he chose not to allow them to live longer, but to take from them the land and to give it to Israel, his typical people.

### **"LED FORTH BY THE RIGHT WAY"**

In applying these matters to ourselves, let us have in our minds the precious words of our Golden Text, "And he led them forth by the right way." With Spiritual Israel it is particularly true that the Lord leads in the right way, in the best way; and that

therefore all truly his people should be careful to note his leadings and quick in following them. In the end we will surely see that he has led us in the right way, however different that way may be from the one we would have chosen for ourselves. The difficulty with many is that the way that they take is not the one which the Lord led and hence not the best way, even though the Lord may overrule their waywardness so that it shall not work to them a great injury which otherwise might have been theirs. The more of the true knowledge of the Lord we possess – the more of the knowledge which perfects our love for the Lord – the greater will be our faith, the more precious will be the results in this present life as well as in the life to come, in which – as star differeth from star in glory – the more faithful of the Lord's people, and more zealous and more Christlike will have the more shining, the more blessed part and experience. Let us then, with full faith in him who has led us hitherto, go forth through the coming days conquering and to conquer, fighting against the world, the flesh and the Adversary, strong not in ourselves but in him who has called us and led us hitherto.

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