

### JOSHUA

#### Lesson 6 - Chapters 3 and 4

Last week, in between the end of Joshua 2 and as a preface to chapter 3, we discussed the matter of how to best read the Bible and especially the Tanakh, the Old Testament (although it applies to the New Testament as well, just to a lesser degree). And we learned that all societies in the Old Testament era were based on oral communication rather than textual. Therefore even that which was written down was written in a way meant for reading aloud to a group (small or large), as opposed to being written like a novel or a textbook that is meant for reading silently and for personal study.

Therefore we find all kinds of literary devices in the Tanakh that serve to enhance oral communication of it's contents such as repetition, alliteration, assonance (meaning a series of words that sounds similar to another connected series of words), rhyme, songs, and even a certain rhythm of phrases and sentences, NONE of which is necessary in a textual based system of communication; but it is essential in a system whereby information is passed along mouth to ear.

So remember this as we move on in our studies; the spoken word was the way that tribal and national history, tradition, and laws were generally passed on. Picture families and clans sitting around a smoking campfire after their evening meal; children, young parents and the grandparents all listening intently as they stare into the cragged and weathered face of an Israelite elder while he holds them spellbound with stories of their ancient past and the God who watches over them.

Turn your Bibles to Joshua chapter 3. We're going to do something a little unusual; we're going to read 2 chapters plus the first verse of another at one time, because it is one complete story. Although we'll study this in sections out of necessity it is best to hear it, as it would have been spoken, because then we'll get a more complete picture.

#### **READ JOSHUA CHAPTER 3:1 – 5:1**

The first words of this story, "And Joshua rose up early in the morning...", are really quite inspirational if understood correctly. In ancient Hebrew society to get up early in the morning to start a task is to display great zealousness to be obedient to God. A person who is said to rise up early in the morning wants to get the earliest possible start on carrying out whatever assignment or work the Lord is doing through them. It is a sort of merit badge, a character trait, and a sign of being faithful that is being ascribed to Joshua.

And Joshua led the people of Israel (who must have been like 3 million excited children impatiently waiting for Dad to come home so they can all leave on vacation) to move from Shittim (where they had been for some time) to a location only identified as being next to the Jordan River. At this new encampment, after being there for 3 days, Joshua's officers went throughout the enormous tent-city giving people instructions on just how it would be that they would cross over the Jordan.

Let's examine something of a controversy concerning this section that has been caused by a kind of modern-day academic discipline called literary criticism. The controversy is that in Joshua 1:11 Joshua instructs people to get ready to move out, because in 3 days they will cross over the Jordan. Now here in Joshua 3:2 it says that AFTER 3 days the officers went through the camp giving instructions about how the people were to follow the Ark of the Covenant across the Jordan. During all this time the 2 spies were sent out to Jericho and had their dealings with Rahab, then they returned and gave their report to Joshua. So the issue is: was there ONE 3-day period that began in chapter 1 vs. 11, and ended with the crossing of the Jordan at the end of chapter 3, or were there TWO 3-day periods (one at Shittim another camped on the Jordan) or what? Well I think it's pretty straightforward that there were not only two separate 3-day periods, but also another couple of days thrown in to boot. I'll show you why it matters.

We have the first 3-day period occurring at Shittim; the people have been camped at Shittim for quite some time (a couple of months or more), and so Joshua gives the order for the people to prepare to move out in 3 days. During this same time the 2 spies go to Jericho. They hid themselves for 3 days, returning either late at night on the 3rd day or early on the 4th to Joshua. Their return gave Joshua the information he needed and so that same morning, the 4th day, he led Israel to their staging ground at the eastern edge of the Jordan River. At the end of 3 more days the officers went through the camp telling people to get up and go through the River and to follow certain instructions about the Ark of the Covenant. Chapter 3 says that the NEXT day the tribes got into battle order and began to cross over the Jordan.  $4 + 3 + 1 = 8$ . What we have is an 8-day period from the time Joshua gives the order to move across the Jordan until it actually happens. Numbers have great meaning in the Bible; they act like a guide (perhaps even a reality check) to help us understand the heavenly context for what is happening on earth. What does the number 8 represent in Holy Scripture? Atonement and redemption. Remember how I told you in our previous lesson that just as "inheritance" was the byword for the redemptive process of Israel for hundreds of years until this moment, now the attribute of "rest" (*nuach*) would become the new byword and goal for redemption. Crossing the Jordan into their inheritance was a milestone of Israel's redemption. Crossing the Jordan moved Israel into their inheritance and 8 is the Biblical number for redemption. Is that not fascinating?

What else is fascinating is that the term and action of "crossing-over" played such a major role in Israel's redemptive history. Abraham crossed over the Euphrates River at God's instruction to go into a new land that the Lord would show him. In fact the term crossing-over was memorialized into the very identity of the Hebrews because the word Hebrew is taken from its Akkadian language cognate, *Ipuru*, which means, "one who crossed-over". Crossing over would become the requisite for all who wished to join the people of God.

There is perhaps no greater story of crossing-over than Moses leading the Israelites through the Red Sea; this act officially took them out of Egypt and into the Wilderness. This crossing-over the Jordan officially takes Israel out of the Wilderness and into the Promised Land. And notice that in the Bible crossing-over always involves passing through water. We see this God-pattern of utilizing water as a symbol of crossing-over in the ritual of baptism. Even the notion of being born-again brings us the image of passing through the water of the womb to get to the other side. We had Noah being preserved in an ark while water cleansed the world of wickedness and Noah and his family crossed over that water and emerged on dry ground. Yeshua calls Himself living water, and that living water is the ONLY available path to mankind in order to cross over from our sinful state into a renewed life of rest and hope and service to Yehoveh.

Since it was the Torah that established the God-patterns that will exist forever, and the patterns will be the boilerplate from which the entire Bible will emerge, Joshua becomes the first book where we watch as these patterns begin to be acted out inside of the Promised Land and so I'm going to pause on numerous occasions to point them out to you. I think by doing this you'll soon be able to read the New Testament in a whole new way, and be more able to help some of your friends and family to understand why knowing and believing all of God's Word (and not just the 4 Gospels) is not only valuable but necessary.

Let's continue in verse 3; there it says that (while Israel was camped on the banks of the Jordan River) Joshua's officers began to spread the word on some critical instructions about crossing over the Jordan. And the most critical instruction concerned the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark would lead the way and the people were to keep their eyes on the Ark but also to maintain a distance of 2000 cubits (about a half a mile) from it. The movement of the Ark would be Israel's signal to move. Up to now the fire-cloud was the signal to move, and it led the way. When it began to move then the Wilderness Tabernacle was disassembled, the camp was struck, and the Israelites would form up in a very specific order with the tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun leading the way (following the fire-cloud), with Reuben, Simeon and Gad next. Then the Levites would follow in a middle and protected position, carrying the Tabernacle and all of its furnishings. The remaining tribes followed after the Levites, bringing up the rear of the column.

So what we have as the Israelites cross over the Jordan is a major transition. No more fire-cloud to lead the way; that era ends on the east bank of the river. Instead the Ark of the Covenant would represent God's presence and so it would lead the army of Israel from now on, and it would lead from the front as the fire-cloud used to. Understand: every Israelite alive at this moment knew of the fire-cloud of God as their ONLY source of divine direction. It must have been pretty unsettling to awaken to a new paradigm that no longer would they have it to depend on; thus we have Joshua's officers carefully going through the camp explaining the NEW reality or else the people would have had no idea how to respond (and likely would have been very fearful to go forward with no fire-cloud in sight).

The people were to keep this distance because of the extreme holiness of God's presence and the danger of too close of human proximity to it; danger to the life of the human and the sanctity of God.

By the way, in time it became a rather strictly enforced regulation of Tradition among the Jews that the 2000 cubits between the Ark and the people was to be the same as a Sabbath Day's journey. That is the furthest anyone could walk or ride on the Sabbath was 2000 cubits.

Now follow me closely please, because this is key: the same concept of extreme sanctity of the Ark of the Covenant was now applied to the people: verse 5 instructs that the people (the entire congregation of Israel) were to be sanctified. Sanctify means to be made holy; and why was Israel to be sanctified? Because over and over the Lord says to His people, "You must be holy for I, Yehoveh your God, am holy". Fellow Believers, we simply don't pay any attention to this command and it is very harmful to our relationship with the Lord. While on one level we have been sanctified by our trust in Yeshua so had Israel been given a kind of sanctity by means of their trust in Yehoveh. This kind, or level, of sanctity was spiritual; it was sanctity by fiat. God declared that Israel was holy, so they were holy. End of story. Yet on another level another kind of sanctity was also demanded, a sort of physical sanctity. This kind of sanctity is reflected by obedience to God's commands, and a mimicking of His attributes in the life of His followers. The idea is that the spiritual sanctity given by God's grace ought to lead to physical sanctity IF the individual truly loves the Lord. This principle has never changed and is spoken of over and over as central theme of the New Testament.

I'm not sure why this concept that absolutely has never changed is such a threat to the Church. Hardly a week passes that someone dashes to the podium to tell me how fortunate we are that we don't HAVE to obey laws that can't be obeyed because they are too hard. They explain that trust in Jesus has replaced obedience to God. I doubt there is a person who is hearing this message who doesn't feel a sense of deep loss over the watered down and seemingly powerless state of the Church in our day. Folks it is this erroneous doctrine that grace has replaced obedience that is at the heart of the problem.

So allow me, one more time, to state what the Scriptures state on the subject: the law AND Christ's sacrifice are BOTH acts of God's grace. The New Testament is not the only place in the Bible where God's grace is present. The Law is grace because it has revealed to men what was formerly heavenly truth; and that truth tells us what pleases and displeases God, and how to live a redeemed life. Christ is grace because He permanently atones for us, permanently cleanses us, and brings us to a state of perfection (not otherwise obtainable) that allows us to be in the presence of God for eternity. We are NOT saved by the grace of the Law, and conversely we are NOT living a redeemed life simply because we have decided to trust Christ. Being redeemed and living redeemed are two entirely different things. Thus the grace of the Law and the grace of Yeshua are for two different aspects of redemption. Yeshua (and nothing else) gives us salvation, and the commands of God (and nothing else) show us the way to righteous living (righteous behavior), as a redeemed person ought to live.

Understand: Israel was NOT redeemed by the Law; first they were redeemed by God's grace, THEN they were given the Law. Modern man is NOT redeemed by the Law; first we are redeemed (by the blood of Christ, who is God) THEN we are given the Law.

The Law is NOT for the world; the law is only for the redeemed. The reason for this is self-evident; no man can even carry out the Law properly unless He has the Spirit of God guiding

Him because proper Torah observance **DEPENDS** on trusting God; otherwise we'd be attempting by our own strength and our own sinful state to accomplish holy things. Rabbi Baruch has done a wonderful job explaining this from another angle in his article entitled, "Is the Torah in force today?" that is available on the Torah Class website.

In the context of verse 5 and its instruction that all the people of Israel are to sanctify or (to invent a word) to "holy-fy" themselves, this is a situation whereby a people long ago declared sanctified by Yehoveh were to physically perform a sacred act of sanctification to honor the Lord by their obedience. The Israelites weren't sanctified on a spiritual level, then un-sanctified as it wore off, and now they have to be re-sanctified. This, again, applies to the modern Believer. But notice the key word here in God's instructions: He says to the Hebrews sanctify **YOURSELVES**. Does this mean that Israel can just declare themselves holy? Or that by performing some rituals they have now, by their own works, merited their **OWN** sanctification? Not according to Genesis 15:6 whereby the principle of salvation, redemption, is established. "Abraham believed in Yehoveh, and Yehoveh credited that to him as righteousness". Israel **NEVER** merited their redemption; modern Believers never merit our redemption, and the Law is not about meriting redemption it's about an appropriate response **TO** being redeemed.

See, this is a parallel situation to a person who is drawn by God towards Messiah Yeshua. There **IS** an act of God involved in our redemption and there is also an act of **SELF** involved; the Lord draws us **BUT** we must accept by means of a decision of our minds.

God, in a supernatural divine act, redeemed and sanctified Israel on a spiritual level upon their rescue from Egypt. But on a physical level Israel had obligations; they were **NOW** required to follow God's action with one of their own: sanctified behavior. So just as the words make so clear here, what Israel is doing for **THEMSELVES** is to do an **ACT** of sanctification. Or in more modern lingo, they will do some sacred observances ordained by God as an outward demonstration of their inner condition.

So this physical act of self-sanctification is the standard Levitical purification ritual as explained in the Torah: the people are to wash (immerse) themselves in water, and they are to wash (immerse) their garments in water. And, of course, it must be **LIVING** water (a running spring or a river) that is used. Thus is the reason that it was necessary that Israel relocate from their camping place at Shittim where water was scarce to the banks of the Jordan River where running water for the purpose of self-sanctification for 3 million people was abundant.

The people are now prepared; the spiritually sanctified are now physically sanctified and in verse 6 Joshua gives the order to the priests to take the Ark of the Covenant and move out ahead of the people (thereby passing the people). And the Lord tells Joshua that He is about to make Joshua very great in the eyes of Israel; and this is **NOT** to magnify Joshua per se, this is to demonstrate to everyone that must as the Lord was with Moses so He is with Joshua.

Is it not fascinating that Yehoveh would do something in the exact same mold as He did with Moses to show God's favor upon Joshua; God parts the Jordan River just as He parted the Red Sea. Now of course **HOW** it happened had to be different because the two bodies of water were different in nature; the Red Sea was, well, a Sea. It didn't have a "source"; it was a giant

pool of water. The Jordan on the other hand was a flow of water that descended from far to the north towards the Dead Sea. Therefore the Red Sea had to be parted, while the Jordan had to be dammed up for a while.

The priests were to carry the Ark to the water's edge and once their feet touched that water, the flow would be stopped.

The Jordan River was either a trickle or a torrent depending on the time of the year. Most people I take with me to Israel are usually disappointed by the Jordan River because they're expecting the Jewish equivalent of the Mighty Mississippi. It's not very big, and it's not very deep, and it doesn't flow very fast during most months of the year. In fact a child could wade across it in many spots most of the time.

But, in early spring when the snows of Mt. Hermon are melting, the river widens, overflows its banks and becomes dangerous and difficult to cross. This was the condition of the Jordan when Israel was instructed to cross it. We KNOW this was the time of year because verse 15 explains that it is during harvest season that this happened, and chapter 4 tells us that they crossed over the Jordan on the 10th day of the 1st month of the New Year. The 1st month corresponds to late March or early April by the modern calendar.

At this time of year, even in modern times, the water can be 12-15 feet deep and it moves very rapidly. It is usual for it to overflow its banks so that it is wider than usual in many spots. At a good ford it is possible for a strong swimmer to get across, but it's risky. But 3500 years ago the flow was greater than it is now. That is because so much water is diverted from the Jordan to satiate the thirst of an otherwise dry land and the millions of people who live there, the millions more tourists who come and visit, and the residents and guests who want to take long showers, and wash their cars and clothing, just as we do. The Jordan is substantially smaller today than in Joshua's era.

All of this is to explain that just as the Israelites took one look at the Red Sea and knew they were going nowhere, so Joshua's Israelites took one look at the deep and swift Jordan and thought the same thing: now, how is it that we're getting across THAT?! Isn't that the way God works? He leads Israel to cross the River at the WORST possible time. Come a month earlier, not so bad. Come a month later, not nearly the problem. But to come right at the peak of its flow? It would take a supernatural act of the Lord to get them across and of course that's what He did.

Several miles upriver, at a place identified in Joshua as Adam, a city near Zarethan, the Lord blocked the southern flow of the Jordan River. An interesting word is used to describe this blockage; **karet**. It is the same word that is used to describe the result of a curse for disobedience to the Lord. If one becomes unclean from Tzara'at, he or she is taken out of the camp and karet, cut off, from his or her people. If a person commits murder they are cut off by being executed, and cut off (karet) by being permanently separated from God. So it is a spiritual term that often carries with it a physical manifestation. It usually involves some kind of death (physical, spiritual, or both) because separation from God IS death.

Karet is a VERY strong term, and so it is that the Lord **karet** the Jordan River to keep it from harming His people; it's absolute, it's without mercy, it is NOT gentle. The Lord cut off the flow, and in a short time the river bottom was exposed and (without explanation) dry. Then the priests carried the Ark out to the center of the riverbed and stood there while the people passed by.

Get the picture; many miles of riverbed was exposed and dried. The people passed across the supernaturally dried riverbed, with the nearest view of the Ark being from about 1000 yards. Without doubt, due to the sanctification rituals they had to perform in the river, they had already spread out, by tribe, along at least a 2 or 3 miles of the Jordan River bank. Crossing would have been very easy and rapid as the terrain was relatively flat (perhaps a 20 foot gradual drop from the bank to the center of the river bed then back up again at its worst. Besides it was probably little more 50 to 75 yards from one side to the other.

Let's move to chapter 4.

Once everyone had passed over, probably taking most of the day, another instruction was given; stones were to be gathered from where the priests stood with the Ark and brought to riverbank. It is here that we find out what the 12 men, one from each tribe of Israel, who had been selected without reason being given in chapter 3 vs. 12 are to do: they are the ones who may each take one rock and deliver it be set up as a monument. The monument was to mark where they had crossed over and the fact that they HAD crossed over. This was a momentous event; another definable moment in the process of God's redemptive plan for mankind could now be checked off of the list.

Take notice: these 12 men were given permission to get very near to the Ark of Covenant to gather the stones. I'm sure they were a bit shaken and not at all certain whether this was an honor or a suicide mission. For sure the Ark was still there because the riverbed was still dry. Also notice that after Israel crossed the Red Sea they erected 12 stones, one for each tribe, so the two crossings are closely tied together. The 12 stones would be used that very night, at the camp they would set up near Jericho. You can be sure that the King of Jericho knew precisely the whereabouts of Israel, and it was not a happy thought. Not only that I suspect that the timing of Israel's crossing was an unwelcome surprise; with the harvest season rush of the water we can be sure he figured he had at least 2 or 3 more weeks (even a little more) to ready his defenses (as hopeless as the situation would be). God wants these stones to be a source of inspiration for His people. When the descendants of those who actually made the crossing are asked what the 12 stones mean, then the parents are to recount this amazing story of divine deliverance. It is both a Scriptural principle and a Hebrew Tradition that each Jew (or Israelite) speaks about the Exodus and conquering of the Promised Land as though they personally participated. This is an attitude that the Lord wants them to have; their identity with their historical past is to be a common point shared by all Hebrews. This is really the same kind of thought that is expressed in modern Christianity; a historical event from centuries earlier is made into a personal confession of faith. Have most of us not sung that beautiful Christian hymn, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they nailed Him to that tree?"

Apparently on his own, Joshua also set up 12 stones in the middle of the Jordan where the other 12 stones were removed. That this account of the crossing of the Jordan was edited at a later date is evident with the next words of verse 9, “ And they (those 12 stones) are there to this day”. As I mentioned in regard to the harvesting of the 12 (actually 24) stones, the Priests remained there until all the people had crossed over, and until the stones were selected, and until Joshua gave the order to allow the river to resume its flow. Once the priests stepped out of the water the water was released and the river returned to normal. The Ark again took up its new position as leading the procession of tribes.

Verse 12 gives us an interesting piece of information: the 40,000 troops provided by Reuben, Gad and Manassah were the first to cross, ahead of the other tribes. The reason though not stated must have been because they had earlier been described as the best warriors and because it was wise to put experienced troops to the front going ahead of the women and children. If they encountered the enemy (a good possibility) they would be ready and the families would be safe. But it also demonstrates the faithfulness and loyalty of those 2 ½ tribes that land for which they would never personally possess might be won upon the spilling of their blood. It would not be until the time of David that we'll again see such an expression of selfless unity as we see right about now among the 12 tribes of the Israelites; because as the battles for territory proceeded year after year, and as each tribe in succession claimed its land allotment, the settled tribes had less and less interest in helping their brothers in the Holy War of conquest and more in simply living and attending to their own tribal affairs.

Verse 14 makes it clear that one of the purposes for the Lord's choosing this rather spectacular method of Israel crossing over the Jordan was to magnify Joshua. I don't think it takes too vivid of an imagination to picture the awestruck looks of wonderment on the faces of those Hebrews as they walked across on dry ground what had only hours earlier been the very place where they had carefully bathed and washed their clothes in an act of self-sanctification, because to venture more than a half dozen feet beyond the river bank risked being swept away in the fast moving current of those chilly waters. The desired result was achieved; the people held Joshua in highest esteem for the remainder of his days, just as they had with Moses. This unequivocally confirmed Joshua's divinely appointed leadership over Israel.

The twelve stones removed from the Jordan were carried to the site of Gilgal, about 3 or 4 miles north of Jericho; it was there that Joshua would order the monument erected to their crossing over the Jordan and acceptance of their inheritance of Canaan as their own land. Gilgal would become the first, and a very important, center of worship and culture of the Hebrew in the Promised Land and we'll read much about Gilgal in later books of the Bible.

That they entered the Promised Land on the 10th day of the 1st month of the year is significant because in only 4 more days they would celebrate the 1st Passover in their new home. The 10th day of the month is when the lambs for the slaughter are to be chosen, and thereby consecrated as God's sacred property.

Well the Wilderness journey, those 40 years of testing and growing and winnowing, is now officially ended and God's people have learned many valuable lessons along the way; but perhaps none will be more important in the years of battles that lay ahead of them than

realizing that God does not help them automatically. The Lord ONLY helps His people when they are obedient to His commands and this is a principle they will test over and over again, at times causing them the severest agony. This teaching greatly troubles the contemporary people of God, and much of the Church denies and denounces it entirely. To look around us today one would think that God's chosen as well as God's grafted in people honestly believe that this great principle has changed (or at least it ought to have changed); that in fact the Lord is OBLIGATED to help those who call on His name. That if we pray to receive Christ, our work is done. Once we have Jesus in our hearts the need for obedience to the Father has ended. We have no need to pray for guidance, it will just come. We have no need to sacrificially follow Yeshua, as did His earliest disciples, all that lay ahead for us is peace and comfort and wealth. We have no need to study His Word to learn how to live a redeemed life, simply ***being*** redeemed is sufficient.

There were times when the glory of God was so visible and present and pulsating with such power within His people, that Israel's (or our) merely showing up struck fear into the hearts of all who oppose Him, but those times have been few and far between. And the reason is quite simple: God's people down through the ages have chosen not to be obedient the Word of the Lord or faithful to their redemptive King, this age notwithstanding. I will close today's lesson with verse 1 of Joshua 5 that tells us what happens when the Lord's own do what is right and follow Him without reservation:

***CJB Joshua 5:1 When all the kings of the Emori on the west side of the Yarden and all the kings of the Kena'ani near the sea heard how ADONAI had dried up the Yarden River ahead of the people of Isra'el until they had crossed it, their hearts failed them, and they fell into depression because of the people of Isra'el.***