

Joshua

And
The Land of Promise

by

F. B. Meyer, B.A.

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CHAPTER FOUR

PASSING THE JORDAN

(Joshua 3:10)

“Omnipotence is on your side,
And Wisdom watches o’er your heads,
And God himself will be your Guide,
So ye but follow where he leads:
How many, guided by his hand,
Have reached ere now their fatherland!
Press on! Press on!”

- Lehr

THE words “**I will drive out**” are familiar ones in the Mosaic record of the Exodus. A dozen times at least God promised, through his servant, to drive out the nations of Canaan before his people. Sometimes it was to be wrought by sending an angel, and sometimes a hornet; for though God’s righteous acts are fair and lovely to his children, they are terrible to his adversaries. All that Israel had to do was to march straight before them into the Land of Promise; and they would find that kings would flee apace, and that the mightiest armies would give back.

There were several reasons why it was needful for God to drive out the seven nations which dwelt in Canaan. But chief amongst them stands that suggested by the memorable interview held between The Lord and Abraham, the ancestor of the chosen race, four centuries before the iniquity of the Amorite was now full (Genesis 15:16).

In the first place, *the nations of Canaan had abandoned themselves to the most abominable immorality.*

After enumerating several impure actions, which were not to be so much as named amongst the chosen people, Moses, speaking as the mouthpiece of The Lord, said, “**Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things; for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you, and the land is defiled: therefore do I visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants.**”

The destruction of the people by the sword of Israel was only the hastening of the natural results of their shameful vice. The reasons which necessitated the Deluge of water necessitated this deluge of blood. Plague-spot as it was, Canaan would have infected the world had it not been passed through the fire.

In the second place, *the Canaanites were steeped in spiritualism, and held close communications with the demons of the air, which have always been forbidden to men.*

On the eve of Israel's entrance into Canaan, Moses said, "**There shall not be found with thee one that useth divination, one that practiceth augury, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a consulter with a familiar spirit, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For whosoever doeth these things is an abomination unto the Lord; and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee**" (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

These terms include:

- Mesmerism; *the use of evil spirits to get aid and information;*
- Demoniacal possession of bodies of mediums; and
- Apparent summoning back of the departed.

"All these things are a transgression of the limits of humanity as laid down by the Creator. And the unlawful confusion brings its own immediate punishment, in addition to the fearful judgment to come. For our body appears to be intended to serve as a fortress; and is not improbably devised for the very purpose of sheltering us in some degree from the corrupting influence of demons" (Pember).

When, therefore, man breaks through this strong fence, and opens a passage of communication with the fallen spirits around, he exposes himself to God's direst wrath; and for the sake of the race these black arts must be stayed.

And this last thought gives a new complexion to this conflict. In driving out and destroying these demoralized races, God was in effect waging war with the evil spirits, who from their seat in the heavenlies were ruling the darkness of that land. This conflict was not against flesh and blood; "**but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.**"

The mighty armies marshaled against Israel were dissipated as chaff before the breeze of the summer evening; because the demons whom they worshiped were being driven out before the Lord's host, the Captain of which appeared presently to Joshua.

At this time, probably, to celestial watchers, Satan appeared to fall as lightning from Heaven. And thus this old record is invested with a new interest. It is not simply the story of the conquest of Canaan; but it is a fragment from the chronicles of Heaven, giving an episode in the eternal conflict between light and darkness, between Heaven and hell, between the Son of God and his great antagonist, the devil.

What an interesting additional analogy is presented by this fact, between the Book of Joshua and the Epistle to the Ephesians!

God graciously vouchsafed a sign of the ultimate issue of the war; so that through the seven years of coming conflict the people of Israel might be at rest as to the result.

“Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan.”

The passage of the turbulent waters of Jordan was to be the Heaven-appointed sign: just as the passage of our Lord through death, his resurrection, and ascension, are the Heaven-appointed auguries and signs that he shall at last put down all rule, and authority, and power; destroy the works of the devil; and give up the kingdom to God, even the Father.

I. THE PASSAGE OF THE JORDAN

At the close of the three days of preparation there seems to have been a movement of the camp from Shittim, with its acacia groves, to a spot within a mile of the boisterous rush of the swollen floods. There Israel spent the last memorable night of pilgrimage and wandering. As the dawn broke, the officers again passed through the host, and bade the people watch and follow the movements of the ark. A short interval only would elapse before the congregation had struck their slight black tents, packed up their household goods, adjusted their burdens, and stood in one great host, two and a half millions strong, prepared to tread the untried path - the way that they had not passed heretofore though it led into the valley of death. The sun was rising behind them, its beams flashing on the Jordan, a mile of water broad, and setting in bold relief the white walls of the houses of Jericho; whilst all the adjacent hills of Canaan stood around veiled in morning mist, or robed in the exquisite garments of light.

At last a little group emerged from those densely crowded hosts. It was the chosen band of priests, white-robed, barefooted, who slowly descended the terraced bank of the river, bearing on their shoulders the sacred ark, its golden lid and bending cherubim hidden beneath their covering of blue. How awful the silence! How fixed the gaze that followed them every step! How hushed the voices of wiseacres and gainsayers who had been loud all the previous days in protesting that the passage was impossible; and that it would be wiser to wait until the mile of water had dwindled to the normal width of thirty yards when the stream was four or six feet deep, and easily fordable!

Nearer the little procession went; but even when it was within a yard of the river brink, its approach effected nothing. The waters showed no disposition to flee or fail. But when the feet of the priests were dipped into the tiny wavelets, brown with mud, yeasty with the foam of their hurried rush, a marvelous change took place. They began to divide and shrink away. And as the priests pursued them, descending ever farther toward the midst of Jordan, they fled before them as if panic-stricken.

“What ailed thee, thou Jordan, that thou turnedst back?”

Nothing could account for so great a wonder, save the presence of the God of Jacob, and that the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth was passing through those depths.

Far up the river, at a distance of some thirty miles, at Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan, the flow of the river had suddenly stayed, and the waters, unable to hurry forward, gathered into a heap, and probably formed a vast lake that spread itself for miles. From that point and downward, the waters, no longer supplied from above, began to fail; they hurried toward the Sea of Death, and were swallowed up in its dark, unwholesome depths. **“They were wholly cut off.”** And as there were none to follow, the river-bed for miles was dry; and the people, hurrying down the bank, **“hastened and passed over.”**

Mark the all-inclusiveness of the miracle. It did not concern the strong only, but also the weak; not men only, but women and children; not the loyal and true only, but the querulous, the murmurers, the doubters, the fearless and unbelieving. Achan, whose heart was preparing for his deed of sin; and Caleb, the hale warrior, who wholly followed the Lord. Not one was missing. The feet of the priests stood firm till every individual of the redeemed race had crossed the river. It is a blessed anticipation of the keeping back of a more awful flood until without one exception the entire host of the Church has entered that city whose walls are Salvation, and its gates Praise.

And this was the promised sign. For he who could drive out the waters would drive out their foes. Having done so much, he would perfect that which he had begun. No child of the kingdom may put his hand to the plow and then look back; how much less the King himself!

II. THE TYPICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PASSAGE

The Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil. The dispossession of the devil from the position which he has usurped is as certain as that of the Canaanites from the Land of Promise. His doom is sure. He must be cast out. Our Emmanuel will not fail nor be discouraged until our great enemy and all his armies have been cast out of the heavenlies into the earth, and out of the earth into the abyss, and thence into the lake of fire. And this is the sign of it, that he dipped his feet in death; and, dying, abolished death. It fled before him, as Jordan before the priests; and for those who live and believe in him, though the semblance of dying remains, it is as a river-bed from which the water has shrunk away, and the blood-bought go over dry-shod.

Christian people do not seem to understand this glorious fact. They think that death to them will be much as it has been and is to the myriads who die out of Christ. But surely this is a profound mistake. When Jesus died, he entirely altered the article of death for all who believe.

“Through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

In view of these considerations what a ray of light flashes on several of these sentences!

“There shall be a space between you and it [the ark].”

Yes, the Lord Jesus preceded his Church. He first passed through the grave in resurrection power. **“Every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits, afterward they that are Christ’s.”**

In all things, and therefore in this also, he must have the preeminence. When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them; and his sheep follow him. **“The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the LORD on the head of them”** (Micah 2:13).

“And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee.” And surely the exaltation of Christ as the God-man dates from the moment that he stepped into the hurrying waters of death and dried them up. **“The God of Peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the Sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.”**

“The priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm, until all the nation were passed clean over Jordan.”

Thus does the merit of Jesus avail

“Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved to sin no more.”

The waters of judgment may be accumulating for all who cling to the old Adam-stock; but they can never slip from their leash until every trembling laggard soul that will has passed into blessed rest. You may be young, or crippled, or ready to halt, or much afraid; but if you will but cast in your lot with the host of the ransomed, the Priest will lengthen out the dispensation, and hold the waters back for you.

“The people hastened and passed over.”

Not that they were afraid of being caught in the rush of water; but that they might not overtire the waiting priests, patiently standing, the precious burden on their shoulders. Has not the patience of Jesus been greatly exercised during these long centuries? He longs to take his bride to Himself, to reap the harvest of his tears, and see of the travail of his soul. Let us hasten the coming of the day of God, by learning all his holy lessons, doing his blessed will, and hastening the Lots that linger at the gates of Sodom.

Here, then, is the blessed sign of the final victory of the Son of God; and every Christian who passes into the Land of Promise, Rest, and Victory, who begins to live the resurrection life, who knows what it is to stand in conscious rapture of power, is another pledge that ere long the song shall be heard ringing through all the spheres:

**“The kingdoms of this world
have become the kingdoms of our Lord,
and of his Christ,
and he shall reign for ever and ever.”**

III. THE BEARING OF THIS PASSAGE ON CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

(1) *We have already seen the effect produced by the death of the Lord Jesus on death.*

It is appointed unto man once to die. And since we have died in him, we shall find death robbed of its terrors. The darkness of the valley is only that of a shadow. But this is not all. By virtue of our union with him, we have passed through death on to resurrection ground, and have become **“the children of the resurrection.”**

It is on this fact in our spiritual history that the apostles base many of their most powerful arguments and appeals.

- **“How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”**
- **“Ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead.”**
- **“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.”**

(2) *With this truth we can foil the most bewitching fascinations of the world.*

- We have passed out of it with our dear Lord.
- We have left it behind us on the other side of his grave.
- We cannot love it which crucified him, and us in him.
- We have died, and our life is hid with Christ in God.
- We have risen, and seek those things which are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.
- We have become citizens of the new Jerusalem.

If we still move amid the world’s engagements, it is in the garb of strangers and foreigners - men from the other side of the river, who speak the language and wear the attire of the heavenly Canaan the language, love; the attire, the white raiment, pure and clean, washed in the Blood of the Lamb.

It is true that Jordans always roll between us and our Canaans.

We are permitted to catch glimpses of spiritual experience, which is not only within our reach, but evidently intended for us. A face lighted up with an unearthly glow; a recital of experience; a passage in a book; a text; a sermon these have revealed something as radiant to our gaze as Jericho must have seemed to those weary travelers. But there is a Jordan between us and it. And the turbulent waters seem an impassable barrier.

There is no hope that we shall be able to cope with these things by any might or wisdom of our own.

As well might we seek to arrest a river in its flood, or curb the ocean in storm.

The opposition of that relative; the hatred of that persecutor; the strength of that passion; the tyranny of that habit; the untowardness of our circumstances these are our Jordan. How easy life would be if only these were other than they are! Give me Canaan without its Jordan!

But God permits the Jordans that he may educate our faith. Do not look at the troubled waters rushing past; at the Priest, who is also the Ark of the Covenant. He will never send us by a way that he is not willing to tread before us. **“Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan.”**

Keep in living fellowship with the Apostle and High-Priest of your profession. Consider him. Look away from all else to him. Follow him. It may seem as if he is leading thee into certain destruction; but it shall not be so. When thou comest to the dreaded difficulty, be it what it may, thou wilt find that because his feet have been dipped in its brink, it has dwindled in its flow. Its roar is hushed; its waters are shrunken; its violence is gone. The iron gate stands open. The stone is rolled from the sepulcher. The river-bed is dry. Jericho is within reach. **“They passed over right against Jericho.”**

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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