

In the book of Joshua we learn how God is faithful to His covenant promise to give His people the land He promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – the land of Canaan. The LORD God, through mighty miracles, brought His people into the land, and then went with Israel to conquer 征服 the Canaanite nations in the land.

At the end of the book Joshua said to Israel: **And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed.** (Joshua 23:14)

The book of Joshua is an Old Testament form of the Great Commission which Jesus (the Greater Joshua) gave to His disciples when He said: **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.** (Matthew 28:19-20) God promised His people they would inherit 承受 the earth, and sent Jesus to go before them and with them to take over the nations of the earth with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

As they set out to take over the nations, Jesus promised: **I am with you always even to the end of the age.** We have no strength in ourselves to take over the land God has promised to us. Only the presence of Jesus Christ going before us, with us, and behind us can bring us success in attaining what God has promised. And we must trust Him to take us the whole way.

In Joshua 3-4 the LORD tells us how He brought Israel across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. The main point of these 2 chapters is: The people of Israel whom God has saved cannot take one step in their own strength; they are completely dependent on the Lord for their help step by step. If He does not go with them, they can do nothing. **Apart from me you can do nothing,** Jesus said. (John 15:5) But with His presence they will be carried through the most impossible things!

### **1) Here we see how the LORD led His people across the Jordan River into the Promised Land by the ark of His power**

God led His people across the river with the ark of the covenant. The ark of the LORD has the central focus in this great event. After the 2 spies came back from Jericho (Joshua 2), the people moved closer and set up camp near the east bank of the Jordan River. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, the officers of the camp went through the camp **and commanded the people, "As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it.** (Joshua 3:3)

They were to keep a distance of 2000 cubits (about 1 km) from the ark so they could follow it properly since they didn't know the way (see v. 4). And **consecrate** 分别为圣 yourselves, said Joshua, **for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you!** (5) This will be a big day for Israel to see the greatness of God and they must make themselves ready! (It's like getting ready for worship on the Lord's Day so you can be properly prepared to see the greatness of God.)

Then we come back to the ark – the ark was extremely important in Israel: (6) **And Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on before the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people.** Later it is called **the ark of the LORD, the LORD of all the earth** (3:13) and **the ark of the covenant of the LORD** (4:18). It was the small golden box that the LORD instructed His people to build at Mt. Sinai. Inside were the stone tablets with the 10 commandments. It was covered with a lid 盖 called "the mercy seat 施恩座" which was the throne of God.

- It was the place where God put His glory in the midst of Israel.
- There He met with His people, showed them mercy, and led them in His way through the wilderness. (see Exodus 25:22)
- The ark was a type and prophecy of Jesus Christ, for later the LORD God would come down and reveal His glory as a man. (see John 1:14). In the ark, Jesus Himself was powerfully present with the Israelites in an Old Testament form!

In the ark 约柜 of the covenant going before them, the LORD gave His people proof that He Himself was right in their midst: **Joshua said, "Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Gergashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan.** (Joshua 3:10-11)

In the rest of this chapter, and on into chapter 4, we learn just how central the ark of God's covenant is in the midst of God's people – in 4 ways:

- 1<sup>st</sup>, the ark goes before them and brings them to the place where they must cross the Jordan (3:3)
- 2<sup>nd</sup>, the ark opens up the Jordan river at that place – as soon as the priests step into the river, God cuts off the flow of water! The chapter keeps reminding us that it's not the *priests* but the priests carrying the ark. It's the ark of the covenant – **the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth.** (3:13)
- 3<sup>rd</sup>, the ark keeps the river open as the priests stand in the middle until everyone has passed through to the west bank (3:17)
- 4<sup>th</sup>, in Joshua 4:15-18, we read that after everyone is across, the ark is carried the rest of the way to the west bank, and as it leaves, it causes the water to flow again.

See how the LORD's power – placed in the ark – leads them and brings them the whole way across. Jesus is the beginning, the middle, and the end of their deliverance! This revelation from God in the ark comes as a critical moment in Israel's life as a nation. They are about ready to enter the Land of Canaan. They are a step away from mighty Jericho and all those giants they will face in the land that flows with milk and honey.

And now the LORD shows them in the ark of His power that He is their covenant Saviour who leads them the whole way. What must they do? Simply trust Him and follow Him. He is fully sufficient for whatever lies ahead! They should not be afraid! The LORD who saved them from slavery in Egypt will lead them the whole way to the finish line. The LORD teaches us here that no matter what we face on the road ahead to the Promised Land of heaven and the new creation, He will lead the way and open up the way for us. I will never leave you nor forsake 离弃 you. This promise is more than mere words; it is real, powerful action from our Lord Jesus Christ day-by-day, step-by-step.

## 2) We also see in this miraculous event the Faith of God's people

The LORD, through Joshua, gave the people a very simple command: **...you shall set out from your place and follow the ark.** (3:3) But it is a huge command! Just follow where the LORD leads you. Where the priests go with the ark ahead of you, you fall in behind. You follow. You follow to the river; and you follow into the river.

This was a major challenge to their faith. Can they trust Him to keep them safe as they cross?

- Dale Ralph Davis in his commentary on Joshua (No Falling Words) tells us of a cartoon he saw in which 4 priests are carrying the ark to the edge to the Jordan River. As they come to the edge of the river, one of the priests turns to his fellow priests and says with a look of fear: *Did you stop to think how silly we're going to look if Joshua is wrong?*
- For the priests and all the people this is a major act of faith in Joshua as the one who receives the Lord's word, and in the ark. To step into the Jordan river at flood stage, with your wife and kids, with a wall of water piled high upstream! *What if the water doesn't hold and I'm only half-way through??*

If you visit the Jordan River today, it is quite small. Irrigation 灌溉 and other factors have decreased it. But if you go back even 200 years, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, things were quite different.

- The Jordan valley from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea is anywhere from 3-14 miles wide, depending on where you are
- Within this valley, there's a flood plain which is anywhere from 600 feet - 1 mile wide. It is filled with tangled brush.
- Then the river channel itself was (at least in the 1800s) 90-100 feet wide, 3 feet deep at the crossing places, 10-12 feet deep at the deepest places.
- It wasn't a lazy slow-flowing river. At its beginning from the Sea it drops about 40 feet/mile, and overall, 9 feet/mile.
- But God chose to have them cross at flood stage! Depending on the type of year it was, it may have been a mile-wide, rushing river!

But you follow the priests! You follow Joshua's orders! This is a major challenge to their faith, but God planned and intended this major challenge to their faith for two reasons, we are told:

- a) He wanted to exalt Joshua in the eyes of Israel: The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt 表彰 you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. (Joshua 3:7) The LORD wants to prove to them that they have in Joshua a leader who is from the Lord. With him they are safe. This miracle will accredit 评审 and certify Joshua before the people as their leader. In the same way the miracles of Jesus, especially the resurrection, are God's proof to us that Jesus is from God, and God's call to us to follow Him – **Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested 表明 to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst** (Acts 2:22). When you follow Him, you will be safe. He will lead the whole way to your inheritance in the Promised Land of heaven!
- b) He wanted to encourage Israel with this sign of power that as He leads them across this Jordan River obstacle, he will also overcome every obstacle 阻碍 they will face on the other side until the whole land becomes their possession. **And Joshua said, "Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Be-hold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan.** (Joshua 3:10-11)

What Joshua says is this: The ark carried by the priests will open up the Jordan river for you to cross – this is a sign from God that you may know the living God is among you and will go ahead of you to take out the nations and give you the land. Here is proof to encourage and strengthen your faith at this critical time.

What a mighty and tender God we have! He knows they are in need of a demonstration of divine power as they face their enemies, those giants, an impossible task that is before them. They must learn to trust in the power of the living God of the covenant completely, and not in their own strength. What a wonderful way to do this! The ark of God leading the way, and opening the way, and taking them across the whole way to the other side of Jordan!

As they believe in Him, He will demonstrate His power to them, so that they will be able to believe in Him even more! Isn't that the purpose of every test and challenge the LORD puts before us? As you follow Him through this test and you witness His powerful faithfulness and mercy to you, He is strengthening your faith in Him for what lies ahead. One demonstration of His power in your life is actually preparing you for a greater demonstration of His power in your life!

### **3) Finally, we see in this event the miracle of the LORD's presence (14-17)**

It happened just as Joshua said it would: the priests went to the edge of the Jordan river at flood stage with the ark, and as soon as the soles of their feet reached the water, the presence of the living God went to work among the people in a mighty act of God's divine intervention 属神的干预. The water piled up in a great heap a distance away upstream, near a place called Adam, while the water flowing downstream was cut off; it just disappeared down the river! And the priests take their stand with the ark in the middle of the river.

The whole nation crossed over on dry ground until the crossing was completed. They entered the land **opposite Jericho** (3:16). Maybe they could see those huge walls in the distance!

So the living God demonstrated His saving, conquering, mighty presence right in their midst! Remember 3:5: **Tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.** When the LORD is in our midst, when He is present with us, He does wonders among us. *And is He not in the midst of His believing people in an even greater way today now that Christ has come in our own skin and bones, and has poured out His Spirit to be with us and in us?!!* What was pictured for Israel in the ark is true for God's people all the time. The wonder-working Lord Jesus Christ lives in our midst at all times, and works for those who trust in Him.

We have a great Saviour who goes before us and with us to do for us what is impossible for us to do: to seek and work for the coming of God's kingdom in a land that is opposed to his kingdom!

The LORD's ways are strange and even disturbing. We could ask: *Lord, does the Jordan River have to be at flood stage when you tell your people to cross over? Couldn't you choose a better time and make things a little easier for us? Do you have to make things so difficult?*

But this is the way of the LORD, isn't it? This is the divine tendency 倾向 to choose impossible situations in order to magnify our weakness, and also His great power and faithfulness. He does this so that He might show Himself a strong Saviour on our behalf, and also that the watching Canaanites might tremble all the more! Such miracles teach us that the kingdom of God does not rest on the best efforts and wisdom of God's people, but on God Himself and His glorious Christ! He is the one who takes His people into the Promised Land! He is the one who establishes His kingdom there!

He brings us face-to-face with our own weakness by putting us in the realm of the impossible!

But God delights in the impossible. Abraham and Sarah are promised a child when he is 100 and she is 90. Gideon must defeat the Midian hordes with 300 men. Esther must void the law of the Medes and Perisians. Redemption must come from a dead Jesus buried inside Joseph's tomb. 12 unlearned men must turn the world (Roman empire) upside down just by opening their mouths and proclaiming Jesus Christ.

We face the impossible task of holding onto the Word of God when almost all academics scorn 蔑视 it. We must hold onto the Christian faith when the media and popular culture belittle 贬低 and censor it. But there is power in the Gospel – the ark of God – to open up the way for us and lead us to complete victory over the nations.

What about you? Are you keeping your eyes fixed upon the Lord Jesus every step of the way? Are you trusting in His power to destroy the obstacles and opposition against Christ and His kingdom, and bring you safely to your destination? You might be staring at what's impossible too: no joy can ever arise out of this gloom 愁云, no good can ever come out of this disaster, there's no hope here in this situation! But with God all things are possible.

They need only trust Him, and follow Him through everything, and all will be well! Let them – and us – trust His presence to go with us. **But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume 烧起来 you.** (Isaiah 43:1-2)

Jesus said: **Apart from me you can do nothing.** He also said, through Paul: **We can do all things through Christ who gives us strength.**