

Crossing over Jordan

From Sinai to Canaan

Study 10

Warmup



When it comes to travel, most of us have a disaster story. But on rare occasions, travel departures and arrivals can be just perfect. Do you have such an occasion where things could not have gone better?

Introduction

After a long and painful journey from Egypt, including a rather significant detour, Israel finally stepped into the Arrivals Lounge of Canaan. The Canaanite reception was of course a bit frosty, but the transit through customs couldn't have gone more smoothly.

In the lead up to the great Jordan crossing, Joshua sent two spies to check out Jericho - the first city on their agenda of conquest (Chapter 2). The spies found a formidable fortress, and a people trembling, but also something that they did not expect - a woman full of faith and full of intention to find a way to align herself with the God of Israel. The spies instructed Rahab to tie a scarlet cord in her window, so that they could identify her room when the day of battle came; and then returned to Joshua, who set about preparing the Israelites to make the transit.

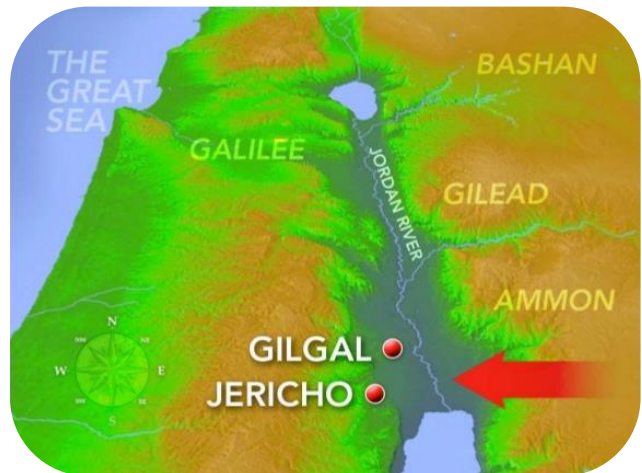
Read Joshua 3:1-14

¹ Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. ² After three days the officers went throughout the camp, ³ giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. ⁴ Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it."

⁵ Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you." ⁶ Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people." So they took it up and went ahead of them. ⁷ And the Lord said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. ⁸ Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.' "

⁹ Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. ¹⁰ This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. ¹¹ See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. ¹² Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³ And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord - the Lord of all the earth - set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap."

¹⁴ So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. ¹⁵ Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, ¹⁶ the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.



First Impressions

Record some of your own first impressions about the passage you have just read.

Question 1

There are a number of times when the Jordan River has been completely cut off. The last time was in 1927, where earth tremors caused an embankment (at the same spot in our text) to collapse, cutting off the waters in the lower section of the river for just over twenty-one hours.

Whether in Joshua's time, God used a rockslide or not to cut off the waters, explain why there is still a miraculous element in Israel's crossing of the Jordan?

Question 2

What is God's purpose in first having the priests approach the flooded river, and dip their toes in, before the waters stop? (What might have been concluded if the waters suddenly stopped flowing, and the Israelites took their chance to cross over?)

Question 3

God could have simply timed the crossing to coincide with the dry season, but in his providence, he brought the Israelites to the crossing during the season when the Jordan is flooded (v15). Can you think of a third reason that shows the wisdom of God's timing?

(1) God loves to keep his promise. When the Israelites crossed over, they celebrated the Passover (Joshua 5:10f), precisely 40 years after that Passover night in Egypt.

(2) God loves to strengthen the faith of his people. The Canaanite deities were meant to be masters of the weather, but by this demonstration of sovereignty over the river, it is clear that the deities of Canaan are not his equal (cf v10).

(3) _____ (Hint: v7) _____

Question 4

Put yourself for a moment in the shoes of one of the ark-carrying priests..... (who were probably bare-footed!) Describe your reaction to Joshua's command to 'go and stand in the river' (v8 & v13).

Now describe your thoughts as you stand on a dry riverbed, while Israel is crossing over (v17).

Now describe your thoughts as you no sooner exit the riverbed, than the waters begin to flow again (Joshua 4:18).

What lessons are to be learned here about faith?



Question 5

God seems to delight to put himself in tricky situations. Joshua announces that when the feet of the priests touch the water, the waters will be cut off. It is an 'all or nothing' position. If it does not come to pass, it is all over for God!

Can you think of some examples from among the New Testament miracles where Jesus puts himself in exactly the same 'all or nothing' position?

Conclusion

There is something quite unusual about this story. It all goes to plan! Israel doesn't muddle the situation, nor spoil the occasion. What is so encouraging about this? What, after all these years, might the Israelites finally have learnt?