

# THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

## The PROMISED *land*

### GOD THE SAVIOR

### *The God Who Goes Before*

The title of today's lesson reminds me of the Chris Tomlin song Whom Shall I Fear. Joshua of so long ago experienced the truth of Tomlin's song centuries before those words were ever written. "I know who goes before me. I know who stands behind. The God of angel armies is always by my side. The one who reigns forever – He is a friend of mine. The God of angel armies is always by my side." Today's lesson takes us to the point in time when the Israelites were ready to venture out on faith under the leadership of Joshua, the successor of Moses. Joshua was named Hoshea at birth which means "salvation." Later, Moses changed his name to Joshua meaning "Jehovah is Salvation."

Joshua and Caleb together showed faith when the 12 spies went into the Promised Land 40 years earlier. One might wonder why God would choose one faithful person over another to step into leadership over the Israelites. Joshua's faithful report was not what 'won' him the privilege of succeeding Moses. That privilege came from his years of preparation. Joshua had been Moses' assistant for 40 years in the wilderness. Moses chose Joshua as general in the battle against the Amalekites where Moses stood on a hill with his hands raised. It was customary for the Jews to lift up their hands in prayer. When Moses kept his hands up the Israelites prevailed. When his hands wearied and came down the Amalekites prevailed.

**Read Exodus 17:12-13 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup> *But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.* <sup>13</sup> *And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.*

The LORD said to Moses regarding this miraculous victory in **Exodus 17:14 (ESV)** <sup>14</sup> *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua..."* Israel's great victory over Amalek involved three elements: the power of God in heaven, the skill of Joshua and the army on the battlefield, and the intercession of Moses, Aaron, and Hur. The LORD wanted that memory stored in Joshua's heart for his future strength in the LORD. We all need to do that – hold fast to the memories of the times when God has delivered us! Remembering those times will strengthen us for future battles.

When Moses was on the mountaintop with God receiving the Ten Commandments, Joshua was waiting on the mountain for Moses to return. He was not in the valley with those who chose to lose hope and worship a golden calf instead of Almighty God. In **Exodus 33**, we find that Joshua was present in the Tent of Meeting when Moses met the LORD there. Let's read of Joshua's leadership appointment.

**Read Numbers 27:18 (ESV)** <sup>18</sup> *So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him.*

Notice that in a time in history when the Holy Spirit did not continually dwell in the faithful, God identified Joshua as *a man in whom is the Spirit*. What a testimony Joshua had! On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to dwell continually in the hearts of those who choose Him. Are we striving to live our lives so that the Presence of the Holy Spirit within us is visible to others and more importantly to God?

God Himself goes before us.

**Read Joshua 3:5-13 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> Then Joshua said... “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.” <sup>6</sup> And Joshua said to the priests, “Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on before the people.” ... <sup>7</sup> The LORD said to Joshua, “Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.” <sup>8</sup> And as for you, command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, ‘When you come to the brink of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.’” <sup>9</sup> And Joshua said..., “Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God.” <sup>10</sup> 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, ... and the Jebusites. <sup>11</sup> Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. <sup>12</sup> Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man. <sup>13</sup> And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap.”

Joshua had been called and set apart. Now, the priests and all the people were being called to set themselves apart from the world as they made ready to enter the land promised to their forefathers. We too are called to be set apart from the world. **1 Peter 1:15-16 (ESV)** <sup>15</sup> but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, <sup>16</sup> since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” We are called to be holy not “holier than thou.”

Their true consecration to the LORD would be revealed by their willingness to be obedient. To arrive in Canaan, the nation of Israel had to cross the Jordan River. This would be the second crossing of a body of water and like the first it would require a miracle of God.

That land had two rainy seasons: one in the fall and one in the spring. The Jordan was at flood stage at that time. The Ark of the Covenant was to go down far ahead of the people, and it was to be carried by the priests who were to be the first to approach the Jordan River and the first to step into the water!

This is a reminder of how consecrated leaders are called to step out on faith in leading their flocks. As the priests stepped into the Jordan’s edge, the flow of water was restrained as if a dam had been put over it. Forty years earlier, 10 out of the 12 tribe representatives rebelled against going into the Promised Land. Now, we see a united front – 12 men – one chosen from each tribe standing firm at the water ready to follow the priests who would carry the Ark. The priests only came from the tribe of Levi. The entire nation took the step together in complete obedience to God!

God calls us to obey in faith. As the old gospel song says, “Step into the water, wade out a little bit deeper!”

**Read Joshua 3:14-17 (ESV)** <sup>14</sup> *So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people,* <sup>15</sup> *and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest),* <sup>16</sup> *the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho.* <sup>17</sup> *Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan.*

Although probably not as widely known as the Israelites' Red Sea crossing (especially in the secular world), the Israelites' crossing of the Jordan is one of the greatest miracles in Scripture.

Note that the priests moved to the center of the Jordan River and stood there holding the Ark until all of the children of Israel had passed over. The Israelites crossed the river at Jericho, but the waters were dammed up way back to the city of Adam.

Remember those 12 men we mentioned earlier? Now we see they too had a job to do.

**Read Joshua 4:2-3 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> *“Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man,* <sup>3</sup> *and command them, saying, ‘Take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests’ feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight.’”*

When these men reached the middle of the river, each man was instructed to pick up a large rock and carry it about eight miles to Gilgal where the nation would camp and a memorial to the miraculous event would be constructed.

**Read Joshua 4:9 (ESV)** <sup>9</sup> *And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day.*

Besides the 12 stones removed from the river, 12 stones probably much larger than the others were set up in the middle of the Jordan where the priests stood as the people passed by. The stones were piled up in a heap. Even though the heap would have been high, it would disappear from sight when the water returned to flood level. The pile of rocks in the river was a discernible way to remind the people how deep the water really was just before they walked through on dry ground.

There were two other notable partings of the waters of the Jordan – the first was by Elijah when he struck the waters with his mantle shortly before he was escorted to heaven by a chariot of fire. The second parting was by Elisha when he struck the waters with the mantle he had just received when Elijah was taken up in the fiery chariot. They were both apparently near the vicinity of Gilgal at the time.

God calls us to remember and testify to His power.

**Read Joshua 4:19-24 (ESV)** <sup>19</sup> *The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho.* <sup>20</sup> *And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal.* <sup>21</sup> *And he said to the people of Israel, “When your children ask their fathers in times to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’* <sup>22</sup> *then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.’* <sup>23</sup> *For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over,* <sup>24</sup> *so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever.”*

It is my understanding that the stone memorial carried out of the water was constructed in the shape of a circle. Gilgal was about two miles from Jericho whose walls were soon to fall down! The stone memorial would be a means of testimony – a way of beginning to tell the story – the story of how the children of Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

Just as Joshua instructed the people to set up stones of remembrance, Jesus left word for His followers to do something in remembrance of Him. Paul wrote of the instructions Jesus gave on the night before His death.

**Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 (ESV)** <sup>23</sup> *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,* <sup>24</sup> *and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”* <sup>25</sup> *In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”*

Without Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians to reenact this meal, a case could have been made that what Jesus did with the disciples the night before His crucifixion was meant for them alone. Paul reveals that Jesus intended that the taking of the Lord’s Supper to be a perpetual remembrance of His passion on the cross.

We observe the Lord’s Supper in remembrance of Jesus. It is not a stone or a cross that we set up to admire but something we do to remember His death. Before coming to the Lord’s Table, it should be a time of consecration. The Lord wants the memory of what He did for us on the cross seared on our hearts so that we never forget the sacrifice He made to save us from our sins. The bread without yeast reminds us of His body without sin – given so freely for us; and the cup reminds us of the His lifeblood intentionally poured out to save us from our sins.

Taking the Lord’s Supper should be a time of remembrance, a time of refreshing and a time of recommitment. **1 Corinthians 11:26 (ESV)** <sup>26</sup> *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.*