

# ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND

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Anyone who has grown up attending church is very familiar with “the Promised Land.” The problem is, what most of us have been taught regarding the Promised Land—how we get there, and even what the Promised Land is—are misconceptions based on a limited understanding of God’s purposes for His creation. Most commonly, perhaps, is the notion that the Promised Land is a place of everlasting bliss, where there are no sorrows or tears. This is an idea promoted in popular spiritual songs, such as “On Jordan’s Stormy Banks I Stand:”

*On Jordan's stormy banks I stand  
And cast a wishful eye  
To Canaan's fair and happy land  
Where my possessions lie*

### **Refrain**

*I am bound for the Promised Land,  
I am bound for the Promise Land  
Oh, who will come and go with me,  
I am bound for the Promised Land*

*Oh, the transporting, rapturous scene  
That rises to my sight*

*Sweet fields arrayed in living green,  
And rivers of delight!*

*O'er all those wide extended plains  
Shines one eternal day  
There God, the Son forever reigns  
And scatters night away.*

*No chilling wind nor poisonous breath  
Can reach that healthful shore  
Where sickness, sorrow, pain and death  
Are felt and feared no more*

*When shall I see that happy place  
And be forever blessed  
When shall I see my Father's face  
And in His bosom rest*

*Filled with delight, my raptured soul  
Would here no longer stay;  
Though Jordan's waves around me roll,  
Fearless, I'd launch away*

This representation, at least as it is understood by the carnal mind, is a false and gross misunderstanding of the Promised Land, and one that has been promoted by religious systems today. It basically equates the Promised Land with a celestial Heaven—a heaven that is attained only after we die. This is also a view that is promoted by many best-selling books these days on heaven.<sup>1</sup>

In this article, I want to strongly make the case that the Promised Land is not a celestial playground or resting place that we enter into when we die (if we have done all the right things while here on earth of course); **the Promised Land is, rather, a state of being or a spiritual reality that is to be apprehended *in this life* by those who are prepared to enter therein. It is, in fact, the *Kingdom of Heaven*, which Jesus said is within us (Luke 17:21).** As with entering a room, entering into a career, or entering into marriage, entering the Promised Land *in this life* is a choice. Entering that reality, however, requires vision to see it. It is my prayer

that this article will help to clarify our vision to more fully comprehend and appreciate the Promised Land that is truly the inheritance that waits for His sons to enter.

In a previous article ([\*The Wilderness\*](#)) I pointed out that the experience of the Old Testament Israelites is a shadow and a type of spiritual realities today, and is instructive for our own spiritual journey. We continue here to look at the journey of these ancient sojourners as a picture of the entrance into *our* Promised Land, being very attentive to what the Spirit of God would reveal as to what is in store for us, should we answer the call to go to His place of promise. I urge the reader to listen carefully to whatever truths that God would quicken unto your spirit as we consider some of the significant and relevant features of Israel's journey as it applies to our time as *spiritual beings having this earthly experience*.

### **A New Generation Must Enter the Promised Land**

The Israelites had spent forty long years wandering in the wilderness after being delivered from the hand of Pharaoh in Egypt. Theirs had been a miraculous deliverance with signs and wonders accompanying. These miracles included the dividing of the Red Sea for their safe passage across, only to reunite the waters to drown the Egyptian warriors pursuing them; providing a cloud by day and fire by night to guide them through their wilderness journey; and bringing forth water from a rock when they were thirsty, among many others. Despite these demonstrations of God's care, they complained almost continuously.

Then came that decisive hour at Kadesh-barnea, when the Israelites were presented with the vision of the Promised Land. They were to go up and possess the land without fear, because the Lord God would deliver the land into their hands (Deut. 1:20-21). Spies were sent to scout out the land. The spies came back with a good report: that the land was flowing with milk and honey. The spies also reported that the people in the land were strong, *giants* in fact, and that the cities were fortified. All of the spies, excepting Joshua and Caleb, were in fear of the Canaanites, and their report struck fear in the heart of the people, who refused to go up despite God's directive to take the land with His promise that God Himself would go before them.

Because of this response of fear, none of the Israelites who crossed the Red Sea with Moses were allowed to enter the Promised Land with the exception of Joshua and Caleb. Not even Moses! All of them died while wandering yet another 20 years in the desert. Joshua and Caleb were the only two of that generation that God found faithful during this wilderness journey. They saw, believed and entered. Consequently, it would be a *new* generation, those who had been born while on the wilderness journey, who would be the recipients of God's Promised Land. This new generation did not have the experience of being under bondage to an Egyptian pharaoh. Nor did they witness God's miraculous intervention at the Red Sea. Most of them were too young to remember any of the miracles that were performed. What they *did* remember, no doubt, was the complaining that they heard from their parents.

And so it is that God is preparing a new generation to enter the Promised Land today. Do you see what the experience of these ancient Israelites is foreshadowing? None of the old carnality can enter into the Promised Land! God will keep us in the wilderness until we have truly died to the carnal generation *within us*. Only that which has been made pure by the refining fires of the wilderness will take this land. As we will see, this is exactly what took place with the under-20 generation Israelites years later when they crossed the Jordan under the command of Joshua, carrying the ark of the covenant before them, marching mightily into battle against the fortified city of Jericho. These warriors had sanctified themselves, and the ark of the Lord was carried across the Jordan ahead of them. Before going into battle with Jericho, these young men were circumcised, made pure by the cutting away of the foreskin. This is the very circumcision that we, too, must go through. Ours is a spiritual circumcision of heart that is taking place, even as the Lord is creating in us a purity and glory all of His own. This is discussed more fully below, but I would make the point here that we are being made a new and pure generation, and we are learning who we are as sons, so that we can go forward in His strength to co-labor with Him in establishing His Kingdom, our Promised Land, on earth as it is in Heaven!

In addition to the generational ties to the old order that God is putting to death *within* each of His sons, the Promised Land is reserved for a new generation

corporately as well. God has visited a previous generation with many signs and wonders, just as He did the children of Israel. We have seen the outpouring of His Spirit in manifold ways. We witnessed it in the Great Reformation to which Luther's name has been attached; in the great revivals of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; and in the outpouring in Wales and at Azusa Street. The Latter Rain Movement of the mid-twentieth century saw mighty signs and wonders, including supernatural healing. Yet none of this was the Promised Land. These were demonstrations of God's power and His faithfulness to a people He was calling to the Promised Land. *These were the miracles in the desert.* These manifestations were squandered, however, as denominations were formed around exclusive doctrinal positions, as leaders of these movements built great ministries unto themselves, and as these great moves of God were institutionalized, and even marketed as businesses, into human organizational efforts to "contain" them. With few exceptions, these leaders were eager to partake of the grapes and pomegranates that the Promised Land held forth, but like the remaining ten spies, were dissuaded from entering the Promised Land because of fear of the giants that had to be overcome there.

Who are the giants that we face? As we approach this question, we must keep in mind that Jesus said that the Kingdom of Heaven (the Promised Land) is *within you*. Consider the incredible shift of this spiritual geography: **The Promised Land is WITHIN YOU!** Therefore, we understand that the giants that currently occupy the Promised Land that must be overcome are, first and foremost, the beast within each of us, that scriptures variously refer to as the old Adam, the flesh, the carnal mind, and even the spirit of anti-Christ. This beast manifests as pride, unforgiveness, self-centeredness, and fear and doubt. We must die to all of this! Praise God, we will not destroy these giants, but God Himself goes before us to do this work, just as he promised the children of Israel that He would do for them. I am not suggesting that this will be a cakewalk. The slaying of these giants within us is a fearsome prospect, as the Lord takes us through His refining fires—the very fires of hell—to accomplish this noble purpose. We experience these fires in the context of what we call the cares of life. God uses *all* of the circumstances that we encounter, as the perfect storm He allows for us, to decisively defeat those

giants within by His grace and faith. Are we willing to move forward, on to the battlefield, to allow the Lord to rout this enemy of God—our carnal mind, our very flesh—and bring it into submission to His Kingdom purpose? Will we allow the Lord to complete that purifying work in us which will bring us into the perfection of union with Him as sons, being like Him and seeing Him as He is, which will qualify us to enter into and possess the Kingdom of Heaven, our Promised Land? Or will we, like the first generation of wilderness wanderers, slink from the threat that doing battle with these giants poses, and fall short of experiencing that glorious hope? Stated differently, are we Joshuas and Calebs, full of faith that the Lord our God will successfully lead us into battle and rout the enemy within, or are we one of the ten who are paralyzed by fear at the thought of this enemy and refuse to enter into our land of promise?

The new generation that God is preparing will be a generation of both young people and old people, chronologically. We know any number of saints, up in years, even some who were leaders in various religious denominations and movements, who have abandoned position and the prestige that comes with it, to pursue Christ, to be identified with Him in His sufferings, and have put on *His* righteousness. Despite their age, these are among the new generation qualified to enter the Promised Land. On the other hand, there are others for whom the prospect of God’s purifying fires are too ominous and they hold on dearly to that which they have always known. They regard their carnal minds as informed by the Holy Spirit, in many cases not even knowing that their mind is carnal and in need of renewal! The Bible declares that the carnal mind, even if it is *good*, is enmity to God (Romans 8:7). This generation has yet to subject their minds to the Spirit of God in order to qualify for entrance.

At the other end of the age spectrum, I have met young people with such a passion for God that nothing will deter them from pursuing Him with abandon. One young man whom God had snatched from a life on a downward spiral was filled with gratitude and awe for His Lord when he told me, “All I want to do is waste my life for the Lord!” He was ready to abandon all, and the last correspondence that I had with him, he *had* abandoned all. This young man is a “new generation” pilgrim who is being made ready to enter into and take

possession of the Kingdom of God! Alas, for every one of these, we have also known dozens of young ambitious souls who have sold out to the cheap goods that religion and the world have to offer. They are looking for affirmation from their careers, their churches and pastors, and from their success in the world, even and especially the religious world, as the barometer for their spiritual condition. Despite the fact that they are young in years, they are part of the “older generation” who are not prepared to enter the Promised Land.

Friends, regardless of age, the generation that God is preparing to enter the Promised Land will be comprised of only those who are not looking back with longing to the Egypt which enslaved them, but have been willing to leave the lure of that land. They have rejected the bondage of Babylonish religious systems that have sought to control the Spirit of God and usurp His Headship. They have no desire to “own” and control the mighty work that God is about to do. They have valiantly done battle with the giants in their land, are dead to their flesh and have been conformed to His death through the sharing of His suffering. Their only desire will be to see the Kingdom of God advanced—not some ministry that they purport to be the Kingdom of God. Those of the generation who will enter are determined and free to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit; they are totally abandoned and are single-mindedly loyal to only His agenda. They owe their allegiance and have been attached to Christ as their Head and have learned to submit to the authority of Christ and respond only to His directives. Only these with this precise and absolute Kingdom focus and allegiance are equipped to enter and possess the Promised Land.

### **Moses and Joshua Represent Two Different Reigns**

It is worthwhile to note that Moses and Joshua were very different types of leaders—differences which represented a difference in function and purpose that God had for their leadership. There are, of course similarities. Both were strong leaders. Both had an acute sensitivity to the voice of God and both had a heart of obedience to that voice. Indeed, Joshua was mentored by Moses and no doubt learned much from Moses’ leadership.

We must understand, however, that their respective reigns of leadership were of an entirely different order. Moses was called to lead the children of Israel *out* of Egypt, out of their place of bondage. While the Promised Land was their ultimate destination, it was not for Moses to take them there. He would lead them into the wilderness. He would lead them into, and through, a place of suffering. Here, they would be tested. They would be winnowed. And there would be only two—*only two*—individuals that left Egypt in that generation, found worthy to enter into the Promised Land. Moses himself was not even allowed to enter this place of promise! He was continually confronted with complaining, rebellion, and ungratefulness. And you might say that his leadership was a failure—at least as measured by the standard of taking a generation into the land God had promised to them. Moses' leadership was characterized as much by interceding on behalf of the people, challenging the Lord to withhold His hand of judgment, as it was in speaking forth the voice of the Lord and directing the people in obedience. We might characterize Moses' leadership as *wilderness leadership*. Moses' leadership was one guided and directed by the law that the Lord gave on Mount Sinai. God had called his people out of Egypt and commanded them to live a separate life unto Him by keeping these commandments. They demonstrated that they could not do it, of course, but it was this very order of the law that Moses was called to establish and to lead God's people in throughout their wilderness journey. Indeed, to this very day, Moses is the human representation of the law to the Jewish people.

Joshua, by contrast, exercised a *Promised Land leadership*. The complainers, the rebels, and the rogue stiff-necked people had already been eliminated, dying in the barren wasteland of the wilderness by the time Joshua took the helm. Those in his charge were a new and fresh generation. But while they did not have the guilt of rebellion, neither did they have the living memory of the passing over of the Lord, seeing their eldest sons and brothers spared from the ultimate judgment of the Lord on Egypt. Nor did they have the opportunity to witness the parting of the Red Sea, the miraculous provision of food, or the gushing forth of sweet water from a mammoth rock. To put it simply, Joshua inherited a people who had not personally been part of the mighty moves of God. He was charged

to infuse this new generation with a fresh vision of the Promised Land and of the Lord's purpose therein. Joshua was called as a warrior leader, to lead His people to victory over the enemies that would seek to prevent their entry into and possession of the Promised Land. Joshua's task was *not* to establish God's people as a separate people through the Law, but to establish His purpose by possessing the land of Canaan that they understood as the Promised Land.

Moses and Joshua are certainly types that represent the massive shift in the purposes of God among His people. Moses was called to lead a separatist movement, separating the people of God from those cultures around them, including Egypt. They were to remain a separate people. They were not to intermarry with other peoples. They were also given a code of conduct which would distinguish them from all other cultures around them. Moses was called to lead a people into separation and holiness unto the Lord. Joshua's leadership was of a different order. Indeed, God's first word to Joshua after he had assumed the position of leadership was, *"Moses my servant is dead, now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel"* (Joshua 1:2). **Moses my servant is dead, now therefore...** The old order is passed away!

A new purpose of God is now being instituted, that being to cross over the Jordan and enter into the Promised Land. Joshua's ascendancy to leadership is a heralding of the coming of Christ and the Promised Land of the ancient Israelites a foreshadowing of the Kingdom of God that Jesus came to establish. Indeed, the name *Jesus* is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew *Joshua*. Joshua came to bring to pass the ultimate intentions of God for His people Israel by taking and occupying the Promised Land; *so it is that Jesus came to take His separated people to a place of victory over the principalities and powers of this world which currently occupy the land, and through these people, to establish His Kingdom throughout the earth.*

This new generation under the direction of Jesus through the precious Holy Spirit—our Joshua—is, however, a different kind of people than religion has understood them to be throughout the last 2000 years. They have opened their

eyes to the fact that the religious systems which have represented themselves as the “church” have, for the most part, looked to Moses and his contemporary representatives to lead them. As a result many of those whom God would separate unto Himself remain in the wilderness (if not still in Egypt). Religion, with all of its institutional infrastructure, still represents the old order of the law and has fine-tuned the law to such an extent that not even Moses would recognize it! It doesn’t matter if this is in the Roman expression or the many varied Protestant expressions: **religion represents the law—not the victory of Christ over the prince of this world.** Oh yes, it makes much of the truth that we are saved by grace, through no good works of our own. A careful observation of what happens after one comes into a salvation experience, however, betrays the bent of religious orders toward the order represented by Moses, namely the law. Very quickly, the new convert is expected to “join the church” with all of the requirements that this entails for any particular religious body. They are further expected to become involved in the activities of the local church. There are also doctrinal tenets to which the new believer is expected to affirm, along with a host of behavioral standards to which one must conform, regardless of whether or not these are matters of personal conviction issuing forth from a vital relationship with the Holy Spirit.

I remember so clearly coming back to the Lord after wandering for some 25 years as a prodigal in the far-away land. Oh how glorious that was! I recognized that God had delivered me from a stronghold in my life that I had been powerless to overcome all of those years. I recognized that something had changed within me that only He could have done. *He* had done this awesome thing! There was an intimacy with Him and how wonderful it was to commune with Him, spirit to spirit on a daily basis. I was moved to share my testimony, and to speak of the power of God to deliver from the bondage of sin and addiction. I brought my enthusiasm for the Lord to every church meeting I attended, honestly believing that God had powerful and wonderful things in store for those who would hear and receive. While I now recognize, of course, that my zeal had not yet been purified by the refining fires of the Lord, I believe to this day that this was my obedient response to the Lord. I would soon discover that not everyone shared

my enthusiasm. The religious crowd was amused at best and offended at worst. Within weeks, I found myself confronted with expectations for how I was now to conduct myself. I was discouraged from speaking so boldly about what God had done in my life. There were also the usual expectations to get more involved in the life of the church, to pay tithes, eventually to teach a Sunday school class, and sing in the choir. There was also a “spiritual” language that I was now expected to use, and there were certainly places I could not go and things I could no longer do, even though I had no personal conviction about these things. I do not want the reader to misunderstand me here. All of these are good things *if* they are motivated by the life of the Holy Spirit within....BUT...when these deeds are driven by a need to stay in good standing with one’s church or fellow church members, they are nothing more than religious legalism. Oh, the legal requirements that are placed upon those who submit themselves to the authority of the institutional church today! With deep regret, I must report that I succumbed to the yoke of these religious expectations for many years until God called my wife and me out of that system many years ago. He continues to call out others who are listening with attentive spiritual ears.<sup>2</sup>

God is indeed raising up a Joshua-people in our day! This is a people who recognize that the law—all of it, in whatever insidious form that it may take—has been completely fulfilled in Christ, our Joshua. They know that “Moses my servant is now dead. Now therefore...” This is a people who are gripped by another law, the Law of the Spirit. They have learned to listen to the still small voice of the Spirit in the midst of the clamor of those voices coming from the halls of religious institutions. These called out ones—the true *ecclesia* of God—are heeding the voice of their One True Shepherd. It is *His voice*—not the voice of the “false heads”<sup>3</sup>—that lead those who are so destined into the Promised Land.

### **All of Israel Did Not Enter the Promised Land**

It is most worthy at this point that we consider the fact that not all of Israel ultimately entered into the Promised Land to possess it. The tribes of Gad and Reuben, and the half tribe of Manasseh made the decision to settle east of the Jordan River in the land of Gilead. They had many cattle, and they saw that this

land was good for raising livestock. They made the request of Moses to remain and settle east of the Jordan River (Numbers 32:1-5). Moses was clearly not excited about this request for he knows that without the men of this tribe going to war along with their fellow Israelites, the enemies in the land of Canaan would represent a much more formidable challenge. Moses does, however, ultimately concede to their request on the condition that their fighting men accompany their brethren in the quest to take possession of the Promised Land. They were allowed to build cities in Gilead and settle their wives and children there before going off to war.

This is almost a side note in the annals of Jewish history, but it is most significant for our understanding of what it means to enter and possess the Promised Land. Because we have the mistaken idea that the Promised Land is some blissful existence in a place called heaven where we go after we die, many of us do not have a paradigm for the fact that not all who proclaim the name of Christ will enter into the Promised Land. I am not referring here to those who have not come to a saving knowledge of Christ, and whom much of Christianity today has condemned to an eternal hell. God, in His omniscience and mercy, has His plans even for these (and it is not to an eternal place of torment), but this is not what I am addressing here. I refer, rather, to those who love God, acknowledge Jesus as their savior, but who, because of lack of vision and fear of leaving what they know, do not go on to enter into the land of promise. These many-numbered believers, represented here by the tribes of Gad, Reuben and half-tribe of Manasseh, are satisfied to remain outside of God's best that He has prepared for them. They are satisfied because the cost of going on in to Canaan is very great, and once they get there, the battles will be fierce. They remain on the other side of Jordan because they are comfortable where they are and are satisfied to live off the fat of the circumstances they currently find themselves in. They prefer to stay in the comfort of that which they can *see*. They have no spiritual eyes to see the greater good that waits for them in the Promised Land or to behold the greater thing that God has for those who will trust Him with their very lives. These are those who walk by *sight*, and not by *faith*.

This does *not* mean that God loves them any less! Just as God loved the tribes of Gad and Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and provided for them in the land of Gilead, so does He love those who make the decision to remain in spiritual Gilead. But let's be clear: these do not taste of the bitter gall that comes with taking up one's cross, daily, having submitted to their own death to be conformed to His. They do not understand the agony that Promised Land-bound saints experience in their lives, and indeed, often make very unspiritual judgments about them. Because they are unwilling to partake in the Lord's suffering, they will never share in His glory. While God loves these and blesses them, they will never taste of the Promised Land as victors who are destined to rule and reign in that land.

### **Spying Out Jericho**

Before even crossing the Jordan, Joshua sent out two spies into the city of Jericho. Jericho was a walled city, sitting virtually on the banks of the Jordan. It would have to be conquered before the Israelites would ever be able to occupy the Promised Land. Jericho and its walls represented a formidable challenge to the children of Israel. Its walls prevented them from seeing into the city, to assess the strength of its people or to even size up the physical challenges that would present themselves to the Israelites as they marched in to take over the city. Hence, it was necessary to spy out this city.

I believe that the spies that Joshua chose were carefully selected as trustworthy men who would give a true report. Any experienced military man knows that true and accurate intelligence is critical to success in war. The scripture is not clear as to Joshua's specific motive in sending the spies. The land of Canaan had already been spied upon some 20 years earlier, and from this foray, the Israelites generally knew what was before them. Possibly Joshua was merely wanting to get a report on the physical layout of the city of Jericho; or maybe he wanted to know something about the people of the city. Scripture is silent as to his motive. But the scripture would seem to suggest that *God's* purpose was to provide a basis for confidence that they would be victorious over this enemy. The spies snuck into the city and were given succor by the prostitute Rahab. She gave them

protection when the men of Jericho learned that they had breached the wall of the city. The significant thing that these spies learned, however, is that the city of Jericho was in terror of the Israelites. This was invaluable information because it was a confirmation that the Lord was going before them, even to the point of striking fear in the hearts of their enemies. What a confidence God was now building in His people in preparation for their first assault on the enemy currently in possession of the land that was promised to them.

So it is, that as God is readying us to take possession of that land that He has prepared for us, He has given us forerunners (spies) who have gone before and have seen and tasted of what lies ahead for us. Those to whom we look for a true and accurate report of what lies ahead must be faithful witnesses of that which God has in store. We must not be lulled into a false sense of material well-being peddled by the merchants of prosperity that consume so much of Christian television and takes up so much shelf space at Christian bookstores; neither must we be horrified or discouraged at the messages of doom and gloom prophets who fill up the other end of Christian bookstore shelves and who are preying upon the fears of a generation who simply cannot see the sovereignty of God in all that is taking place in our world today. The reality is that yes, there is indeed an enemy that inhabits this land of promise that Jesus boldly called the Kingdom of heaven. This land does not belong to that enemy, however; it belongs to God and His sons. The enemy is no match for that bold and fearless army that God has prepared throughout its wilderness journey by emptying each member of all self-confidence and establishing Himself as their source of confidence. The true report of the spies, those faithful forerunners who have blazed the trail before us, is that we can go forth in the full confidence that God is going before us and that every enemy *will* be defeated!

### **Crossing the Jordan**

Israel was encamped on the east bank of the Jordan River at a place called Shittim as they were preparing to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land. Shittim is significant in the life of Israel, as it was here, years earlier, that the Hebrew men committed whoredom with the Moabite women, in direct disobedience to the

Lord's command. It was also here that Israel joined itself with Baal-peor which greatly kindled the anger of the Lord against them (Numbers 25:1-3). It is, therefore, significant that Shittim would be the launching site for Israel's entrance into the Promised Land. The Lord God of Israel would redeem even Israel's disobedience for His ultimate purpose. Nothing is wasted with God—not even our disobedience! And His punishment is *always* for His redemptive purpose of bringing His people to the ultimate place of promise that He has prepared for them.

The day finally arrived when the children of Israel would pass over the Jordan River. They were commanded to wait until they saw the Ark of the Covenant, the very presence of the Lord, carried by the priests, before they began to move. The Israelites had been trained in the wilderness to wait for the cloud by day and fire by night—also the tangible presence of the Lord—before they moved. If that cloud (or fire) did not move, *they* were not to move. These trans-Jordan migrants were told to keep a distance of at least two thousand cubits between themselves and the Ark of the Covenant so that they could behold clearly the presence of the Lord. This place across the Jordan was a place that they had never been before. They could not depend upon their own senses or abilities to tell them where to go. It was of critical importance that they keep the Ark (presence of the Lord) clearly before them as they crossed.

This is possibly the most important principle that must be learned by those who are of the Joshua Company, those who move and live by the Spirit of God. This company, does not have the luxury (bondage, really) of depending upon the written law or religious traditions to be their guide. They are trained to listen with spiritual ears and see with spiritual eyes what the Spirit is saying and doing, and only then do they move. God is faithful, in *every* generation to demonstrate His faithfulness. He is taking us to places and realms that we have never been before. Our God knows exactly what we need to equip us with an overcoming faith to follow the Ark of the presence of the Lord wherever He is leading us. Praise His name!

### **A Stone Monument**

The crossing of the Jordan River represented the entrance into the Promised Land. It is not insignificant that the Israelites crossed the Jordan at the time of year when it was at its highest level. The Lord God of Israel had another miracle to perform for this second generation of Israelites, just as He did for the first generation at the Red Sea some 40 years earlier. This generation was born in the wilderness and did not see the miracle-working hand of God. It was necessary that they did see it, however, because there would be many battles to come that would require that they would trust in the Lord their God for the victory. Indeed, such a battle was just ahead at Jericho. And so it was that God held back the waters of the Jordan so that His people could march across on dry land.

It would be critically important that the people would remember God's faithfulness to them at the Jordan. There were giants in the land, and the enemy would often seem overwhelming. God would require things of them that they would not always understand, such as marching around Jericho seven times and then on the seventh time, blowing their trumpets. What kind of warfare is that? But trust in God they must. So a stone monument was ordered so that they would never forget God's faithfulness to them (Joshua 4).

This was not the first time, of course, that God ordered such a remembrance. Such monuments were erected frequently throughout the Old Testament. These remembrances were instituted to establish trust through many difficult days ahead. God is still intervening in the life of His people today. Individually and corporately, if we have eyes to see, the hand of God is dramatically evident in the challenges that we have faced. There are occasions when we, too, are instructed to erect monuments as a remembrance of what God has done. These are not stone monuments located on the geographical site of a physical battle or event that has taken place. God has a way of ordering the building of remembrances nevertheless. It may be that, like Israel (Jacob) of old, we are left with physical conditions that remind us of God's faithful dealings with us. There may be material objects that remind us of God's provision through impossible circumstances. Often, as is the case with me, it is a memory indelibly etched in our consciousness, and reinforced by many opportunities that the Lord gives us to share this experience with others. In all of the many ways that God erects the

monuments in our lives, it is for the purpose of remembering and establishing the history of His faithfulness, and thereby giving us faith and courage to persevere through difficult situations and battles ahead.<sup>4</sup>

### **Circumcision at Gilgal**

Israel has now entered the Promised Land, but there is one final act of preparation that must take place before the people of God are positioned to take possession of that Land. The men must be circumcised. All of the men coming out of Egypt had been circumcised, in keeping with God's covenant with Abraham. During the 40 years in the wilderness, however, the rite of circumcision had not been practiced, and so those born during the years of wandering had not yet had the knife taken to their foreskin.

This painful ordeal was necessary for, by covenant between God and Abraham, this was what set Abraham's seed apart from those cultures around them. God's people were a distinctive and peculiar people, and this act of circumcision signified their election as God's chosen ones. It was, of course, a painful rite, and would require a time of respite until they were whole enough to engage the battles ahead.

That which took place at Gilgal is also a shadow and type of what must take place amongst the people of God today. This is not a physical circumcision, of course, nor is this circumcision restricted to those who are born into male bodies. Indeed, Paul declares to believers in Galatia that

*...in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love (Gal 5:6; NKJV).*

Paul has, in fact, just urged the Galatian believers *not* to allow themselves to be circumcised!

*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised*

*that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace (Gal. 5:1-4; NKJV).*

Circumcision had become a matter of merely keeping the law, and Paul was loudly declaring that if the Galatians allowed themselves to be circumcised, they were indebted to keep the entire law—a feat that no one could accomplish in Paul's day or in ours. The need for such was abolished at the cross, and to insist on the necessity of keeping this regulation, or any other, is to make a mockery of the cross.

There is, however, a circumcision of the heart that is foreshadowed by the covenant of circumcision that God established with His people Israel.

*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God (Romans 2:28-29; NKJV).*

God is preparing a people with circumcised hearts, to storm the gates of hell and take down every stronghold against the Kingdom of God in our day! Like the circumcision of the flesh, this is a painful process, as God exchanges our hearts of stone for hearts of flesh. This requires that He strip away all of the strongholds within *us* that would hinder our communion with Him. This is how He separates us unto Himself as a special and peculiar people. Through this painful process, God is re-creating a people in His very image, who have surrendered every other loyalty, and who look unto Christ alone as the Head of His body! Those who have come this far as to cross the Jordan only came to this point by going through the wilderness. Indeed, it is the wilderness experience, as we persevere through it, that accomplishes this circumcision process within each of us. As we have come through that experience with our hearts circumcised, we have been set aside for the work of partnering with Jesus our elder brother to bring the Kingdom of Heaven—our Promised Land—here on earth. What an incredible and awesome privilege that is ours!

## On to Possess the Promised Land

The Israelites have crossed the Jordan and they have entered into the Promised Land. All is now peace and rest, perhaps playing harps and walking on streets of gold, right? Hardly! There would be many battles ahead as enemy forces were entrenched throughout Israel's Promised Land. There would be many tests of obedience that Israel would face, and some of these tests they would not pass with flying colors. Entering the Promised Land merely *positioned* the children of Israel to take possession of it. They could see it now, close up; they could taste of the fruit of that land. If they were going to take possession of it and claim it as their own, however, they must conquer the enemy that currently occupied and held control. Successfully conquering the enemy would require a level of obedience to the Lord and to their commander Joshua beyond the faithfulness of their fathers in the wilderness. It would require a singleness of vision and total commitment to the vision birthed some 400 years earlier in the covenant between God and Abraham. These Israelites would, each one, lay down their very lives as they partnered with the Lord their God to take possession of this land of promise.

Our Promised Land will require no less of us. Religious leaders and their various media of communication in our day have promulgated the idea that if we will only accept and trust in Jesus as savior, and serve Him as diligently as we can while living a moral lifestyle, we will then be rewarded with eternal bliss in our Promised Land that we call heaven. I find nothing in scripture that supports such a view.

Jesus had many things to say about the kingdom of heaven. None of what He had to say even remotely resembled the depictions that are propagated from so many pulpits throughout America and elsewhere of flitting about on cumulous clouds, playing harps, sitting around huge banquet tables eating Kentucky Fried Chicken or any of the other popular portrayals of heaven as a gathering place of saints after they die. Let us be very clear—*Jesus suggested otherwise:*

- the kingdom of heaven does not come by observation, but is *within* you (Luke 17:21);

- the kingdom of heaven is *at hand* (not where we go when we die) (Matt. 4:17);
- the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are persecuted (Matt. 5:10);
- there would be some standing beside him who would not taste death until they saw the kingdom of God present with power (Mark 9:1);
- the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and violent men take it by force (Matt. 11:12).

Those who would enter, and eventually possess the Promised Land are those who are being prepared to rule and reign with Christ. They are part of that great royal priesthood spoken of in the letter to the Hebrews.<sup>5</sup> It is not a fanciful pie in the sky after we die. Heavens no! It is, rather, the government of God established by Him within those who realize that His Kingdom that Jesus declared is “within” and “at hand” upon the earth right NOW! This Kingdom is taken by force by passionate men and women who have counted the cost, crossed the Jordan, carried their cross faithfully, and have not stained their garments by “settling.” They are prepared to inherit and possess their Promised Land. It is for us, as it was for the Israelites of old, a possession that must be fought for, apprehended, and possessed. Furthermore, it is one thing to *enter* the kingdom of heaven, whereby we can see and taste the good things that God has prepared for those who serve Him; it is quite another to *take possession* of this land of promise. Taking possession requires doing battle with and defeating the enemy that occupies this reality that has been promised to us. Life is not all peace and bliss after we enter the Promised Land. The battle still lies before us!

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Randy Alcorn's book entitled *Heaven* is one of the top sellers among Christian books still today. More recently, Robert Jeffress' book, *A Place Called Heaven* has become the talk of Christian radio. While these books are top sellers, and probably making their authors quite wealthy, they promote an understanding of heaven that relegates it to some existence in the sweet by and by. The Promised Land—the Kingdom of Heaven—which is truly our inheritance, by contrast, is a very present reality which is being apprehended today by those who have taken up their crosses to follow their Lord, fully understanding and accepting the great cost of entering the Kingdom.

<sup>2</sup> My purpose here is not to convince you that you must leave your church. I want the reader to clearly understand that leaving the institutional church is a choice that one can make only when they are moved to do so by the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is not something that is done lightly, or for any motive other than to be obedient to the Lord and from a deep conviction of the Holy Spirit. My purpose here is to merely assert, as emphatically as I know how, that the system of religious organizations that we call “the church” in Christian circles, in almost every way, is of the old Mosaic order of the law and not of the Joshua order of a conquering generation taking the Kingdom of God by force, overcoming the enemy that still occupies this Promised Land. The reader will even note that I am very careful to avoid using the term “church” to refer to this organization. This is because the biblical word translated “church” is *ecclesia*, which means “called out ones.” I have become convinced that the biblical writers understood themselves to be called out of the religious establishments of their day. I have written more extensively on this in the article, [Ecclesia: Taking Back our Identity](#). I refer the reader to that article, which can be found on this website.

<sup>3</sup> I am introducing the term “false head” here to refer to any person or institution who would raise themselves as an authority over another in such a way so as to preempt the authority of the Holy Spirit in that person's experience. We hope to explore this topic more fully in another article as the Lord further shares His heart with us on this.

<sup>4</sup> I feel it necessary, however, to add here a word of caution that we not create idols of these monuments or past interventions of God. It is so very easy to longingly look back to the last great work of God in our lives, individually or corporately, and establish that experience as the prototype for what God will do in the future. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard sincere believers talk about the “good old days” when God was moving in their midst. They were looking for that kind of move of God again. Many times God does move, or wants to move, but it is in a fresh way and these very people cannot even recognize it because it doesn't look like the last “revival” of which they were a part. I was once part of a small prayer group of men who had been meeting every week at five o'clock in the morning for some 15 years praying for revival. God's spirit began to move one day in that little church, but these very men did not see it because it did not look like the last move of God that they had witnessed. In fact, they sought to undermine this move because *they* were not on the platform when it was taking place. It has been said that the greatest opposition to revival is from those who were part of the last revival. This is because that last revival became an idolatrous memorial that would be used as a template from which to (attempt to) conform all future moves of God. God will not be constrained in this way. Understood properly, past experiences of God's moving among His people are signs and remembrances of His faithfulness. We must incline our hearts toward *Him*, trust Him in the dry seasons, emboldened to keep persevering as we remember His past faithfulness, and be ready to lay down everything we *thought* we knew about God and His ways so that we can respond faithfully as He breathes a fresh and living Word for this day

<sup>5</sup> I would encourage the reader to read the series by J. Preston Eby entitled *The Royal Priesthood*. It is available free of charge through the [Kingdom Bible Studies](#) link on this website. An [audio version](#) of this series is available on the audio/video page of this website.