

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO JOSHUA 3

Joshua removed from Shittim to Jordan, where he stayed three days, (^{<ARB>}Joshua 3:1,2); the people are directed to move when they saw the ark bore by the priests, and what distance they should keep from it, (^{<ARB>}Joshua 3:3,4); are bid to sanctify themselves against the morrow, when wonders would be wrought, (^{<ARB>}Joshua 3:5); and the priests are ordered to take up the ark, (^{<ARB>}Joshua 3:6); Joshua is encouraged by the Lord, and instructed to command the priests when they come to Jordan to stand still in it, (^{<ARB>}Joshua 3:7,8); and he declares to all the people, as a token that God would drive the Canaanites from before them, that as soon as the feet of the priests bearing the ark should rest in the waters of Jordan, they should be parted, and make way for them to pass through, (^{<ARB>}Joshua 3:9-13); which accordingly came to pass, so that all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, (^{<ARB>}Joshua 3:14-17).

Ver. 1. *And Joshua rose early in the morning*, etc.] The morning after the spies had returned and made their report; which, as Kimchi rightly observes, was the ninth of Nisan; for on the morrow, which was the tenth, the people passed over Jordan, (see ^{<ARB>}Joshua 3:5 4:19). Moses, according to the Jewish writers, died on the seventh of Adar or February; the thirty days of his mourning ended the seventh of Nisan or March; two days before they were ended the spies were sent, who returned on the eighth day of the month; and the morning following Joshua rose early, which shows his readiness and alacrity to proceed in the expedition he was directed and encouraged to:

and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan; from Shittim in the plains of Moab, to the river Jordan:

he and all the children of Israel; he as their general, and they an army of six hundred thousand fighting men under him, besides women and children, and others that came along with them:

and lodged there before they passed over; lay there encamped a night before they passed over the river Jordan.

Ver. 2. *And it came to pass after three days*, etc.] At the end of the three days they were bid to prepare food for their expedition, and to go over Jordan, (^{<0611>}Joshua 1:11);

that the officers went through the host; the camp of Israel; very probably the same as in (^{<0610>}Joshua 1:10); this was, no doubt, by the order of Joshua, and who was directed to it by the Lord.

Ver. 3. *And they commanded the people*, etc.] In the name of Joshua, by whom they were sent:

saying, when ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it: the Targum reads, the priests and Levites; so the Septuagint: it was the business of the Levites, particularly the Kohathites, to bear the ark in journeying, but here the priests, who also were Levites, were to carry it: it is remarked in the Talmud^{f39}, that there are three places in which the priests are said to bear the ark; here, and when they surrounded Jericho, (^{<0616>}Joshua 6:6); and when it was returned to its place in the times of David, (^{<1053>}2 Samuel 15:29); and Kimchi and Abarbinel observe a fourth, when it was brought into Solomon's temple, (^{<1086>}1 Kings 8:6);

then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it; their usual signal for marching was the cloud, when that was taken up, (^{<0417>}Numbers 9:17), etc. but now the ark, the clouds of glory having removed at the death of Moses, and were seen no more, as Abarbinel and other Jewish writers observe; and therefore it was proper the Israelites should be made acquainted with this signal; for, as Jarchi says, this journey was different from all the journeys (though that of the three days journey from Sinai must be excepted, (^{<0413>}Numbers 10:33)), for all the time Moses was in being, the pillar of cloud marched first and showed them the way, and the ark moved after two of the standards (Judah and Reuben), and now the ark went first: the cloud was a figure of the dark and cloudy dispensation of the law, particularly the ceremonial law, the shadow of good things to come, and which continued only during the former state, and discontinued to be of any use when the Mosaic dispensation ceased, and when Joshua or Jesus was come: the ark was a type of Christ, the forerunner for us entered, and whom we are to follow whithersoever he goes or directs to, in the exercise of grace and performance of duty; and the ark being carried now by different persons, may denote that Christ was held forth in a weaker manner under the legal dispensation, and by his apostles and

ministers under the Gospel dispensation in a clearer and stronger manner, and who are to be followed no further or longer than as they bear the ark or direct to Christ.

Ver. 4. *Yet there shall be a space between you and it*, etc.] The ark; the Keri or marginal reading is, “between you and them”; the priests that bear it: hence sprung a fiction among the Jews, that there were two arks, the ark of the Shechinah or divine Majesty, and the ark of Joseph, in which his bones were put, which went together^{f40}; which Jarchi, Kimchi, and Abarbinel take notice of, but has no foundation in the text:

about two thousand cubits by measure; by a certain well known measure, that of a common cubit; for the “caph” we render “about” is a note of truth, reality, and certainty, and designs the exact precise measure here given: this difference was to be observed, partly in reverence to the ark, the symbol of the divine Presence; Christ is to be revered by his people, and so his word and ordinances; and there is a reverence and respect due to his ministers and priests that bear the ark; as also that they might the better see the ark and go after it, as Ben Gersom; or the way in which they should go, as is suggested in the following clause; and likewise have the better view of the greatness of the miracle, as Abarbinel; the dividing of the waters of Jordan as soon as the ark came to it, and while it was in it: the Jews conclude from hence that this was the measure of ground they may go on a sabbath day, and no further, called a sabbath day’s journey, (~~4012~~Acts 1:12);

come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go; over Jordan into Canaan’s land; for being at some distance from them they could better discern that and the way he directed them to walk in: Christ the antitype of the ark is the way to the heavenly Canaan, and his ministers point out the right way of salvation by him, in the ministration of the word, by attending to which the way is seen and known in which men must go:

for ye have not passed [this] way heretofore; a path indeed untrodden by any; neither they nor any other ever went into Canaan the way they were now going, through the river Jordan as on dry land: the way to heaven by Christ is only revealed in the Gospel, and only trodden by believers in him, and especially the way to glory through Jordan’s river; or death is an untrodden path, which, though the way of all flesh, is a trackless path, and gone through, but once, and those who pass it have never before gone that way.

Ver. 5. *And Joshua said unto the people*, etc.] On the third day; and the thirtieth day of the mourning for Moses, Jarchi says, was the first of the three days, and that being the seventh day of the month, this must be the ninth, as it is most clear the morrow was the tenth:

sanctify yourselves; in a ceremonial sense, by washing their bodies and their clothes, and abstaining from their wives; and in a moral sense, by acts of religion and devotion, by prayer and meditation, and the exercise of repentance and, good works: it may denote that sanctification is necessary to our passage over Jordan, or through death to the heavenly Canaan, for without holiness no man shall see the Lord:

for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you: in their sight and presence, and for them, by dividing the waters of Jordan, that they might pass through it as on dry land; this, as Kimchi says, was the tenth of Nisan, as is plain from (^{<0019>}Joshua 4:19).

Ver. 6. *And Joshua spoke unto the priests*, etc.] On the morrow, that is, on the tenth day of the month, the day on which they went over Jordan:

saying, take up the ark of the covenant; in which the law was put, which was the covenant between God and the people, from whence the ark had this name; and in which it was typical of Christ, in whom both the law, the covenant of works, was fulfilled, and with whom the covenant of grace was made; who is the Mediator; surety, and messenger of it, and in whom all the blessings and promises of it are, and with whom it is, and will be kept for evermore: the ark, the priests were ordered to take up and bear on their shoulders; for no other way might they carry it; these typified the ministers of Christ who bear his name, his Gospel in the world, (see ^{<4015>}Acts 9:15);

and pass over before the people; over the river Jordan, to direct them in the way through it, and encourage them to follow them:

and they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people; from the place where they had lodged the night before to the brink of the river.

Ver. 7. *And the Lord said unto Joshua*, etc.] Out of the tabernacle:

this day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel; by working the miracle afterwards related; dividing the waters, which was done on this day, and was but the beginning of wonders; for other great and marvellous

things were done for him and by him, by which it appeared he was high in the favour of God, greatly esteemed and honoured by him, and so would be great and honourable in the account of the people:

that they may know that as I was with Moses, [so] I will be with thee; by dividing the waters of Jordan for him, as he had divided the waters of the Red sea for Moses; which, as it was a token of his powerful presence with him, this would be a like token of it with Joshua. The Targum is,

“as my Word was for the help of Moses, so shall my Word be for thy help.”

Ver. 8. *And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the Lord,* etc.] Who were subject to Joshua, the chief governor of the nation, and general of the army, as well as the common people; and whose commands they were to obey, and especially when they appeared to be from the Lord:

saying, when ye come to the brink of the water of Jordan; not of the bank of it, but of the water, which had now overflowed its bank; that is, the brink or extremity of it, which was nearest to them, and to which they first came; though it is a notion of some Jewish commentators ^{f41}, and which some Christian interpreters ^{f42} have given into, and both of considerable note, that this was the further extremity, or the brink on the other side of the river; but, according to this notion, they must pass the river to the other side before the waters were divided, which is not credible; and must return again into the midst of the river, which is not probable; and besides, it is expressly said, that as soon as their feet dipped in the brim, or extremity of the water, the waters parted, which must be the first brim or extremity they came at, (^{ORBS}Joshua 3:15);

ye shall stand still in Jordan; after the waters were parted; upon their coming to, and touching, the brink of them, they proceeded, and went into the middle of the river, where they were ordered to stop and stand still.

Ver. 9. *And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, come hither,* etc.] Very probably to the door of the tabernacle:

and hear the words of the Lord your God; which he was about to deliver to them as from him, and in his name.

Ver. 10. *And Joshua said,* etc.] To the people as follows:

hereby ye shall know that the living God [is] among you; who has life in and of himself, and is the author of life to all his creatures; and is so called in opposition to the lifeless idols of the Gentiles: and it may be, as Abarbinel observes, to suggest to them, that though Moses was dead, the Lord lived, and lives for evermore; and by the following miracle of dividing the waters of Jordan, it would be a plain case that the Lord was yet among them, to protect and defend them, deliver and save them:

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; all the seven nations are mentioned, even the Girgashites, who are sometimes omitted, to assure them of the expulsion of them all, to make way for their entire possession of the land of Canaan, as had been promised them.

Ver. 11. *Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth*, etc.]

Some both Jewish and Christian interpreters, because there is a distinguishing accent on the word “covenant”, read the words “the ark of the covenant, even the Lord of all the earth”; so in some copies of our English Bible, as if the ark was called the Lord of all the earth, because of his presence and dwelling there; but, as Kimchi observes, either the word “ark” is wanting, or the word “covenant”, and may be supplied either thus,

“the ark of the covenant, the ark (I say) of the Lord of all the earth;”

or thus,

“the ark of the covenant, which is the covenant of the Lord of all the earth:”

the true meaning is what Abarbinel gives,

“the ark of the covenant of the Lord, who is the Lord of the whole earth;”

the Maker and possessor of the whole earth, the whole terraqueous globe; and can do what he pleases in the earth, or in the water; and can control the powers of nature, and do what is beyond them, things miraculous and astonishing:

passeth before you into Jordan; not only unto it, but into it, into the river itself; and, by the power of him whose presence was with it, the waters of

Jordan were to be divided, to give them a passage through it as on dry land, and so it came to pass.

Ver. 12. *Now therefore take ye twelve men*, etc.] For what end and purpose is not mentioned. Abarbinel is of opinion, that they were chosen and appointed, that every man might pitch upon and take a place for his tribe to encamp in, when they came on the other side Jordan: whether this was Joshua's view or no is not certain; however, the use he made of these, thus provided by divine direction, is related (^{<ORR>}Joshua 4:2-4);

and these were to be taken out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man; Levi not reckoned, having no part in the land; and so we find that tribe left out in other accounts, when there was a choice of twelve men out of each of the tribes, (^{<ORR>}Numbers 13:4 34:19).

Ver. 13. *And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord*, etc.] Which they were bid to take up and carry, (^{<ORR>}Joshua 3:6);

the Lord of all the earth; this shows that not the ark, but the Lord, is called "the Lord of all the earth", (see Gill on "^{<ORR>}Joshua 3:11"):

shall rest in the waters of Jordan; the meaning is, as soon as their feet should touch them, or they should set their feet in them, when they came to the brink of them:

[that] the waters of Jordan shall be cut off [from] the waters that come down from above; from above the place where the priests came, and the children of Israel after passed over:

and they shall stand upon an heap; or one heap; stop and rise up high, as if piled up one upon another, and stand unmoved. This had been made known to Joshua by divine revelation, and is what he hints at, (^{<ORR>}Joshua 3:5); and now plainly speaks out, and foretells before it came to pass; and which must serve to magnify Joshua, as in (^{<ORR>}Joshua 3:7); and give him great credit and honour among the people.

Ver. 14. *And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents to pass over Jordan*, etc.] Which they had pitched very near it, upon their removal from Shittim, and in which they had lodged the night past:

and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people; at the distance of two thousand cubits.

Ver. 15. *And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan*, etc.] Not to the bank, which was overflowed, but to the extremity of the water overflowing:

and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water; which was doubtless the first they came to, and not the brim or extremity of it on the other side:

for Jordan overfloweth all its banks all the time of harvest; that is, of barley harvest, as appears from the time of year; for it was in the first month, the month Nisan, or Abib, which answers to part of March, and April, it used to overflow, (^{<13125>}1 Chronicles 12:15); and it was now the tenth day of that month, (^{<06049>}Joshua 4:19); on the sixteenth of which, at the time of the passover, the sheaf of the firstfruits of barley harvest was offered up, (^{<03230>}Leviticus 23:10,11); the inundation continued all the time of harvest; and so Aristeas ^{f43} testifies, that

“the river being filled, it overflows as the Nile in the time of harvest, and waters much of the country.”

it overflows its banks both on the one side and on the other, the eastern and western shores. This overflow is supposed to be occasioned either by the latter rains, which fell about this time; or rather by the snow on Mount Lebanon melting at this time of the year, when the sun has great strength in those parts, and which poured down in great quantities into this river, that took its rise from thence. Josephus ^{f44} speaks of Mount Lebanon and of the fountains of Jordan together; and says they have their rise from the mountain; and of the snow of Lebanon (see ^{<24884>}Jeremiah 18:14). This river continued to overflow at this season in the times of David, (^{<13125>}1 Chronicles 12:15); and in the times of Aristeas, who lived in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, king of Egypt, as before observed; and some late travellers ^{f45} observe,

“it generally happens in the month Nisan; that is, from the middle of March to the middle of April, the time of the first harvest;”

but Mr. Maundrell ^{f46}, who was upon the spot in 1697, and at the proper time of its overflowing, perceived nothing of it. He says,

“there is a small descent, which you may fitly call the, first and outermost bank of Jordan, as far as which it may be supposed the river does, or at least did anciently, overflow; but at present

(whether it was because the river has by its rapidity of current worn its channel deeper than it was formerly, or whether because its waters are diverted some other way) it seems to have forgot its ancient greatness; for we could discern no sign or probability of such overflowings when we were there, which was the thirtieth of March, being the proper time for these inundations; nay, so far was the river from overflowing, that it ran at least two yards below the brink of the channel.”

However, at this time of the passage of the children of Israel through it, it was overflowing; which made the miracle the greater.

Ver. 16. *That the waters which came down from above*, etc.] Above where the priests’ feet rested, and which came down from Mount Lebanon, and the fountains of Jordan northward:

stood [and] rose up upon an heap; they stopped their current, and as the water came down they rose up on high, and made one vast heap of waters:

very far from the city of Adam, that is, beside Zaretan; the Cetib, or textual reading, is, “in Adam the city”; we follow the marginal reading, “from Adam”: both readings, as is usually, if not always the case, are to be received; and the meaning is, that this heap of waters, though the river was at a considerable distance from Adam; yet through the overflow of it, it reached to, and was “in Adam”: this city was in Perea, on the other side Jordan, that side on which the Israelites were before their passage; and Zaretan, which is supposed to be the same with Zartanah, and Zarthan, (^{<1K42>}1 Kings 4:12 7:46), was on this side, in the tribe of Manasseh; and the sense is, not that Adam was on the side of Zaretan, or near it, for it was on the other side of the river; and according to the Talmudists ^{f47} was twelve miles from it; but the construction is with the word “heap”, “which [heap] was on the side of Zaretan”; it was there where the waters were heaped up; it seems as if they reached on the one side to Adam, and on the other side to Zaretan:

and those that came down towards the sea of the plain, [even] the salt sea, failed, [and] were cut off; those waters, which were below where the priests’ feet rested, ran down into the lake Asphaltites, where Sodom and Gomorrah formerly stood, the sea of the plain, or vale of Siddim, (^{<0143>}Genesis 14:3); sometimes called the dead sea, and here the salt sea, its

water being exceeding salt; so, Mr. Maundrell, the above mentioned traveller^{f48} testifies on his own knowledge;

“the water of the lake (the lake Asphaltites, or dead sea, says he) was very limpid, and salt to the highest degree; and not only salt, but also extreme bitter and nauseous;”

so that these waters running down thither, and those above stopped, made a dry channel for sixteen or eighteen miles: and the people passed over right against Jericho; which was the city Joshua had in view to attack first, and had sent spies thither to get intelligence of it, and the disposition of the people in it: (see Gill on “~~(111)~~ Joshua 2:1”).

Ver. 17. *And the priests that bare the ark of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan,* etc.] Which for its breadth Mr. Maundrell, the above mentioned traveller, says^{f49} might be about twenty yards over, and its depth exceeded his height; but Dr. Shaw^{f50}, a later traveller still, says,

“the river Jordan is by far the most considerable river, excepting the Nile, either of the coast of Syria, or of Barbary. I computed it to be about thirty yards broad, but the depth I could not measure, except at the brink, where I found it to be three yards.”

Now in the midst of this river the priests bearing the ark stood firm on dry ground, the waters above being stopped and those below cut off. This perhaps might give rise to the fables among the Heathens of the river Scamander being swelled for the destruction of Achilles, and dried up by Vulcan, of which Homer^{f51} makes mention; and of the river Inachus, dried up by Neptune, as the Grecians fable; however, if Heathens can credit these accounts, surely we Christians ought to believe this, attested by divine revelation. And this may denote the presence of Christ with his people in afflictions, who will not suffer those waters to overflow them, and in death itself, when the swellings of Jordan shall not come near them to distress them; and when the covenant of grace will appear firm and sure, and be their great support; and when also the feet of the ministers of Christ stand firm, and their faith fails not; which is of great use, and very encouraging to the spiritual Israel of God:

and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground; the waters being divided to a space large enough for such a body of people to pass over, and which continued

until all the people were clean passed over Jordan; perfectly and completely, not one being left behind, or lost in the passage through it; in the midst of which the priests stood until all were passed over. So the spiritual Israel of God must all go over Jordan's river, or must all go through the valley of the shadow of death; and they will all go over safe to Canaan's land, to the heavenly glory; their souls go immediately to heaven at death, and their bodies will be raised at the last day, and be reunited to them, and partake of happiness with them; nor will anyone of them be lost; they all clean pass over, and arrive safe; for they are the chosen of God, the care and charge of Christ, the purchase of his blood, partake of his grace, and have the earnest of his Spirit.