

SESSION 2

"Entering the Land"—Part 2 "Crossing and Ceremonies"

I. PRAYER

II. PANORAMA OF THE BIBLE BROAD CONTEXT

A. Movements #1-4

1. Prologue.....Genesis 1–11
2. Patriarchs.....Genesis 12–50; Job
3. Redemption/..... Exodus; Leviticus
Wanderings.....Numbers; Deuteronomy
4. Conquest..... Joshua

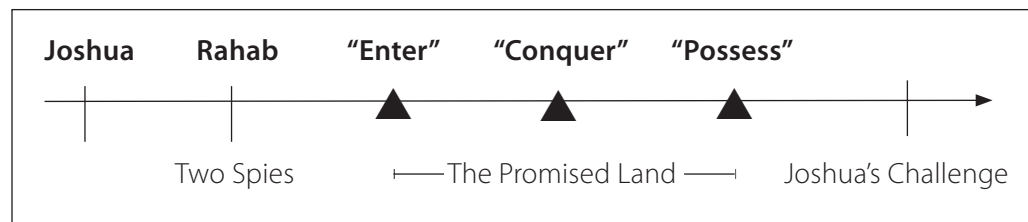
B. Pentateuch (Gen-Deut)

PENTATEUCH				
Genesis	Exodus	Leviticus	Numbers	Deuteronomy
Selection	Redemption	Sanctification	Direction	Instruction
Abrahamic Covenant	Mosaic Covenant	Holiness Code	Journey Rebellion	Covenant Reinstruction

(Taken from R. Cupp, *Panorama Plus* 3, 4)

C. Timeline

"CONQUEST" (Movement 4)



III. BOOK OF JOSHUA

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA					
"Promise/Fulfillment of the Land"					
Enter		Conquer		Possess	
1	5	5	12	13	24
Jordan River		Canaan		East of Jordan West of Jordan	

IV. "ENTERING THE LAND": BIBLICAL DEVELOPMENT (Part II)

A. Crossing the Jordan: Gilgal (Chapters 3–4)

The redeemed Israelites experienced two great miracles of parting the waters. The first was the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 14), and the second was the crossing of the Jordan River (Josh 3–4). These two great miracles helped to define a nation.

The inspired psalmist captured poetically the power of these defining events.

Psalm 114 (NLT)

¹When the Israelites escaped from Egypt—

when the family of Jacob left that foreign land—

²the land of Judah became God's sanctuary,
and Israel became his kingdom.

³The Red Sea saw them coming and hurried out of their way!
The water of the Jordan River turned away.

⁴The mountains skipped like rams,
the hills like lambs!

⁵What's wrong, Red Sea, that made you hurry out of their way?
What happened, Jordan River that you turned away?

⁶Why, mountains, did you skip like rams?
Why, hills, like lambs?

⁷ Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord,
at the presence of the God of Jacob.

⁸ He turned the rock into a pool of water;
yes, a spring of water flowed from solid rock.

1. Preparing to cross (3:1–13)

The crossing miracle is punctuated by three commands in the narrative. Each begins, “The Lord said to Joshua...”

- (3:7–8): Carry the ark (priests) into the river
- (4:1–3): Erect (tribal representatives) memorial stones
- (4:15–16): Carry the ark (priests) out of the river

Further, the commands are communicated to the people, and the people obey the divinely given instructions.

a. Preparation (1–4)

Joshua 3:2–3

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 Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it.

The Israelites had camped near the Jordan River (1). For three days, the congregation had witnessed the Jordan at flood stage (15). Perhaps a sense of human inadequacy had surfaced, a need for divine enablement made very apparent.

The Ark of the Covenant would play a prominent role in the coming drama.

- It symbolized for the nation the power and presence of God among them.
- “Ark” occurs some sixteen times alone in chapters 3–4. It is a central theme and plays a critical role in the Book of Joshua.
- The prominent inclusion of the ark demonstrated that the crossing was more than a military maneuver but a religious procession.

Insight: “Ark of the Covenant”

The ark was the most important piece of furniture in the tabernacle (Ex 25:10–22). Placed inside this chest was a pot of manna (Ex 16:33), Aaron’s rod that budded (Num 17:10), and the two tablets of the Law (Ex 25:16). The lid was called the mercy seat, and once a year on Yom Kippur, the high priest would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat to atone for the sins of the nation.

Spiritually, the ark was a visible symbol of the power and presence of God, and thus calamity followed lackluster treatment of it (cf. the people of Beth-Shemish in 1 Sam 6:19; Uzzah who touched the ark in 2 Sam 6:6–9).

The ark was a simple chest (though gold-plated), but carried powerful spiritual meaning. As a symbol of God’s power and presence, it was instrumental in Joshua for crossing the Jordan River, the defeat of Jericho, and the covenant renewal at Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim (Josh 8:33). Yet it was never to be used as a talisman or magical amulet.

b. Consecration (5–8)**Joshua 3:5**

⁵ *Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.”*

The Israelites had been instructed “to consecrate” themselves in their past.

• Exodus 19:10–11

¹⁰ *And the LORD said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes ¹¹ and be ready by the third day, because on that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.”*

• Exodus 19:14–15

¹⁴ *After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes. ¹⁵ Then he said to the people, “Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations.”*

Joshua 3:7–8

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.’”

- (1) Joshua’s leadership would be authenticated as a result of the miraculous crossing. This is related to the promise that “the Lord will do amazing things among you” (5).

God often used miracles in Scripture to confirm authority. For example, Nicodemus told Jesus, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him” (John 3:2).

- (2) God’s power and presence would be made known when the priests carrying the ark obediently stepped out into the raging Jordan River. This is a major step of faith.

Insight: Faith and Risk

Often in our discussions of Biblical faith, it is easy to miss the theological truth that faith involves risk. For example, Abraham (our “man of faith”) received God’s call to leave the security of a life in Ur of the Chaldeans and take the risk of going to a place he had never seen. Yet faith believes, takes the risk (some theologians refer to this as a “leap” of faith), and obeys (“So Abram left...”).

Stepping out into the flooded Jordan River was a risky (from the human perspective) step of faith.

c. Explanation (9–13)

Joshua 3:9–13

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.”

- (1) The descriptive references to God in this passage are noteworthy:
 - “the Lord (YHWH) your God” (9)
 - “the living God” (10)
 - “the Lord of all the earth” (11)
- (2) The dispossessed peoples are listed, seven in number (perhaps indicating fullness or completeness). Elsewhere the inhabitants are listed in the Books of Moses (Gen 15:19–21; Ex 3:17; 23:28; Deut 7:1).
- (3) God’s presence for future victory is foreshadowed with the ark and subsequent miraculous parting of the Jordan River.

2. Proceeding to cross (3:14–17)

Joshua 3:14–17

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 (that is, the Dead 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 stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

- a. The presence and prominent position of the ark symbolized the presence and power of the Lord.
- b. The miraculous crossing is punctuated by the condition of the river (“flood stage”). Seasonally the Jordan would swell due to melting snows north at Mt. Hermon and spring rains. The river poses a seemingly insurmountable obstacle.
- c. With the feet of the priests carrying the ark touching the flooded Jordan, the waters ceased flowing from the north and “piled up in a great heap... at a town called Adam” (16).

Insight: The Miracle at the Jordan River

"Adam" was north of the crossing point as the Jordan River flows north to south. Scholars identify the site about sixteen miles north at a place now called Tell ed-Damiyeh.

How does one explain such a phenomenon?

- (1) Some believe that a natural earthquake caused the high banks of the Jordan to collapse and dam up the river (historical records indicate that such an event occurred in AD 1267 and AD 1927).
- (2) Others believe that this is a Biblical miracle.
 - It was predicted (3:13).
 - It came to pass (3:15–16).
 - It was unlikely as a natural phenomenon (flood stage, dry land).
 - It was dry for many hours (to allow passage—3:17).
 - It was returned to its original state (only after all had passed—4:18).

- d. The significance of the miraculous crossing is described by Eugene Merrill (109):

Yahweh revealed that he, the Divine Warrior, would fight for Israel now as he had in Egypt. As he had parted the waters of the Red Sea as a sign of his cosmic and redemptive sovereignty, so now he would stop the flooding river. He, as the Great King, would initiate the conquest by conquering the river which, as it were, protected the land. Thereafter his people Israel would know that the battle was Yahweh's...

3. Remembering the crossing (4:1–9)

The Jordan River would never again be supernaturally crossed by the Israelites. To remember such an important event would require the establishment of a lasting memorial.

- a. Selecting stones (1–3)

Joshua 4:2–3

²“Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, ³ and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.”

- (1) Twelve men (one from each tribe) would select twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan.
- (2) The twelve men had already been selected by Joshua (see 3:12) and would perform their task after the people had completely crossed over.
- (3) The twelve stones were selected from the spot near to the priests who carried the ark (therefore the stone memorial commemorated what God had done).

b. Establishing the memorial (4–9)

- (1) The memorial was “to serve as a sign” (6) among the Israelites. For thematic parallels, note:

- **Exodus 12:25–27**

²⁵“When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. ²⁶And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ ²⁷ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’” Then the people bowed down and worshiped.

- **Deuteronomy 6:20–23**

²⁰ In the future, when your son asks you, “What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?” ²¹ tell him: “We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ²² Before our eyes the LORD sent signs and wonders—great and terrible—on Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. ²³ But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land he promised on oath to our ancestors.

- (2) The people obeyed the Lord's command through Joshua (see "Lord said to Joshua" at 3:7 and 4:1).

Joshua 4:9

⁹ Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant had stood. And they are there to this day.

Insight

Trust and obedience mark the Israelites up to this point in the narrative. Joshua has been "strong and courageous" (1:6, 7, 9, 18), and the people have been trusting and obedient.

4. Completing the crossing (4:10–18)

- a. The people "hurried" over (10–11).

Joshua 4:10

¹⁰ Now the priests who carried the ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything the LORD had commanded Joshua was done by the people, just as Moses had directed Joshua. The people hurried over...

- b. The Transjordan fighting men crossed over (12–13).
- (1) Moses had commanded the Transjordan tribes to aid their brothers in the conquest of the land (Josh 1:13–15; cf. Deut 3:18–20).
 - (2) Forty thousand soldiers (less than one-third of the tribes' number—cf. Num 26:7, 18, 34) crossed the river. The remainder stayed on the east side (women, children, elderly, and likely some rear-guard soldiers).
- c. The reputation of Joshua as leader was established (14).

Joshua 4:14

¹⁴ That day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him all the days of his life, just as they had stood in awe of Moses.

d. The priests (with the ark) crossed over (15–18)

Joshua 4:18

¹⁸ *And the priests came up out of the river carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD. No sooner had they set their feet on the dry ground than the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and ran at flood stage as before.*

5. Camping at Gilgal (4:19–24)

On the “tenth day of the first month,” some forty years after the first Passover (cf. Ex 12:3), the Israelites crossed over into the land promised by Abrahamic Covenant. The first encampment was at Gilgal, about two miles northeast of the fortress city, Jericho. The memorial stones were placed there.

Joshua 4:21–24

²¹ *He said to the Israelites, “In the future when your descendants ask their parents, ‘What do these stones mean?’ ²² tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ ²³ For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. ²⁴ He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God.”*

The times of past bondage and wilderness wanderings were complete. The “conquest” of the land lies before the people.

B. Circumcision/Passover (Chapter 5)

1. Circumcising at Gilgal (5:1–9)

The presence of the Israelites brought fear to the inhabitants of the land (5:1). Three historical events would have fueled such fear:

- Crossing of the Red Sea (Egyptians defeated)
- Victory over Sihon and Og (Amorites defeated)
- Crossing of the Jordan River

Joshua 5:2–3

² *At that time the LORD said to Joshua, “Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again.” ³ So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth.*

Insight: Circumcision

Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 17:9–13). It was the appropriate expression of faith in God, the Covenant-Maker, who is the Covenant-Keeper.

Since the sign involved the male reproductive organ, the symbol was closely related to the promise of many descendants to come from Abraham (this is one of three basic covenantal elements: land, descendants, blessing).

Also, entrance into the Promised Land as fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant promise required those appropriating this inheritance to be obedient to the circumcision stipulation. This widespread act (Josh 5:2–8) incapacitated the military might of the Israelites until such time as they healed. Thus, the enactment was an obedient (and risky!) act of faith.

Joshua 5:6–7

⁶The Israelites had moved about in the wilderness forty years until all the men who were of military age when they left Egypt had died, since they had not obeyed the LORD. For the LORD had sworn to them that they would not see the land he had solemnly promised their ancestors to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁷ So he raised up their sons in their place, and these were the ones Joshua circumcised. They were still uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way.

2. Celebrating at Gilgal (Passover) (5:10–12)

Besides the covenant (Abrahamic) ceremony of circumcision, “on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month” (5:10), the Israelites also celebrated the covenant (Mosaic) ceremony of Passover. This would have been the third recorded Passover that Israel celebrated (Egypt, Mt. Sinai, Gilgal). It also marked the end of the divine provision of manna (5:12).

Insight: Passover

Constable (*Notes on Joshua*, 28) points out, “The Law prescribed that only members of the covenant community could eat the Passover. It was a memorial to God’s redemption of Israel out of Egyptian slavery in the Exodus. It symbolized God’s deliverance of His people from tyranny of sin” (cf. Ex 16:35).

The Passover celebration in Joshua 5:10–12 is the third recorded Passover to this point in the Hebrew Scriptures:

- (1) Egypt
- (2) Mt. Sinai
- (3) Gilgal

Joshua 5:12

¹²*The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate the produce of Canaan.*

The desert wanderings had come to a close. Three momentous events had occurred.

- The circumcision of the new generation was completed.
- The celebration of Passover had resumed.
- The produce of the land would now sustain the people (the manna had ceased).

The land described by Moses’ twelve spies of forty years earlier (“flowing with milk and honey”) was now to be taken. Caleb had silenced the fearful people a generation earlier: “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it” (Num 13:30).

The opportunity to do so had arrived.

V. LESSONS TO LEARN

- A. **Faith:** Crossing the Jordan River at flood stage was a faith-demanding moment, particularly for the priests who stepped out first bearing the ark. “When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river” (3:8).

God had not told the Israelites in detail what he had determined to do. The walk of faith is obedient step after obedient step. Alexander MacLauren is reported to have said, “God often opens his hand one finger at a time.”

- B. **Power and Presence:** The ark symbolized both the power and the presence of God. Yet it was just a symbol, not inherently powerful. Symbols must never be worshiped or venerated (e.g., today, crosses). The ark reminded Israel of the critical importance of God’s nearness.

Psalm 16:11 NLT

¹¹ *You will show me the way of life,
granting me the joy of your presence
and the pleasures of living with you forever.*

- C. **Consecration:** Before crossing the Jordan, however, the people were commanded to “consecrate” themselves. To consecrate is to sanctify or set apart or to devote solemnly for a purpose. New Testament believers heed the words of the apostle Paul.

Romans 12:1–2

¹ *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.* ² *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

- D. **Faith and Risk:** As pointed out in the lesson, true Biblical faith carries also an element of risk. Yet, recall the words from Hebrews 11 (the faith chapter).

Hebrews 11:1–2, 6

¹Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ²This is what the ancients were commended for... ⁶And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Got any rivers you think are uncrossable?
Got any mountains you can't tunnel through?
God specializes in things thought impossible.
He does the things others cannot do.

(Jackman, 46)

E. Memorials: The twelve stones served as a reminder of God's miraculous provision in the crossing of the Jordan. The NT church also has two very important remembrances: Lord's Supper and baptism.

Do you have any personal symbols that commemorate God's faithfulness to you?