

Have You Crossed Over Jordan?

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Published and distributed by
Thru the Bible Radio Network
P.O. Box 7100
Pasadena, California 91109-7100
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www.ttb.org

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One of the first lessons we must learn in reading the Bible is to distinguish between that which is written *to us* and that which is written *for us*. Not all the Bible is directed to us, but all the Bible is for us. Now that is a very simple but a very important rule in reading the Word of God.

In this connection we want to call your attention to a very familiar passage of Scripture – 2 Timothy 3:16:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

You see, the Word of God can be used for many different reasons and in many different ways. For example, in Ephesians 4:1, Paul wrote,

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation to which ye are called.

This is from an epistle and the Epistles are love-letters to the church – thus it is *to* you and to me.

In contrast, turn back to Joshua 1:11 where we read, “...Within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan...” We can only hope that you are making your arrangements to cross over the Jordan, for it says that within three days you shall pass over. Some of you are going to have to rush if you get there within the three days, for it is a long distance. And someone will say, “But that is not directed to us.” You are absolutely correct. He really is not talking to us at all. But just because He is not talking to you and me, telling us to cross over the physical Jordan, does not mean that a real lesson – a spiritually rich lesson – does not lie here for us. Therefore, we do ask you this question in all seriousness, “Have you crossed over Jordan?”

All the tribes of Israel did not cross over the Jordan River. Two and one-half tribes never did get over the river, and we find their defection very early.

Moses was still alive when they came to the east bank of the Jordan, and you will find recorded in Numbers 32:1-5 that they made a request:

Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle; and when they saw the land of Jazer, and the land of Gilead, that, behold, the place was a place for cattle, the children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spoke unto Moses, and to Eleazar, the priest, and unto the princes of the congregation, saying, ...Wherefore,...if we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over the Jordan.

That was the specific request of those two tribes, and one-half of the tribe of Manasseh joined them.

Now Moses said to them at that time, “If you want possession on the east bank of the Jordan, all right, but we are going to have to ask, when we cross over, that you send your men of war to help the other nine and one-half tribes to take the Promised Land” (free translation).

To this they agreed. They not only agreed to do it, but they made good their promise. We find in Joshua 1:12-16:

And to the Reubenites, and to the Gadites, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, spoke Joshua, saying, ...The LORD your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land. Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle, shall remain in the land which Moses gave you on this side of the Jordan; but ye shall pass before your brethren armed, all the mighty men of valor, and help them...And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and wherever thou sendest us, we will go.

In reading this, you will note that they honored their word of promise. They said that they would do it, and when the time came, they went over.

Perhaps you are asking a question and it may be this, “Well, what is wrong with dwelling on the east side of the River Jordan? Is it so essential to cross over the river? Is not the east bank of the Jordan River part of the Promised Land?”

Such questions are very pertinent and require that we look at the passage of Scripture in which lies the account of the crossing of the River Jordan.

There are three tremendously important historical facts in connection with the crossing of the Jordan. These facts form certain striking features in the occurrence of this great event.

When they went over the Jordan it was quite different from their crossing the Red Sea. When they crossed the Red Sea, Moses went down to the water and smote the water with his rod. All that night the waters rolled back. But when they crossed the Jordan River, it was actually a greater miracle, for it was flood stage and their crossing caused a holding back of the waters that were rushing to the Dead Sea. We find in Joshua 3:3:

And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it.

And now something new has been added. The ark is to go down far ahead of the people, almost a mile, and it is to be carried by priests who are to come to the edge of the Jordan River and stand there.

When this was done, the Jordan River began to dam up far back as if a Hoover Dam had been put over it. The waters that were this side of it passed on down, and before long there was a dry passage. This was one of the greatest miracles recorded in Scripture.

Probably the greatest miracle of all was when the sun was made to stand still, but the crossing of the Jordan is greater than the crossing of the Red Sea. When all miraculous events are considered it is difficult to say which is the greatest – but here is one that is tremendous.

We are to note that the priests moved to the center of the Jordan River and stood there holding the ark until all the children of Israel passed over.

Now the ark is one of the finest types of the Lord Jesus Christ given in the Old Testament, although there are several others that are conspicuous and outstanding.

The ark had been in the very heart of that camp for forty years in the wilderness march. Every night when they came into camp, the entire twelve tribes of Israel set their tents about the ark. It was the very center. But now, for the first time, that which speaks of Christ goes ahead to the Jordan River and enters it first.

Christ goes before us in death, but He goes with us in life. He *went* before us in death, and when our Lord entered death, He entered it for you and for me. There is a song that we sing today, “I Don’t Have to Cross Jordan Alone.” The Jordan sets forth the death of Christ but under

no conditions does it set forth *our* physical death. When someone sings that song we always feel as if we should voice words of comfort telling the folk that they will not have to cross it alone. He has already gone in for us. He has already crossed for us in death.

Also we often sing the old song, “On Jordan’s Stormy Banks I Stand.” To begin with, that is not quite a stormy stream, neither do you and I stand on the stormy banks. He alone was nailed to that cross and hanging there bore all the storms of the judgments of sin; they fell on Him. And when they fell on Him, they fell on us. Let us look at three things:

- 1 – The Red Sea speaks of redemption
- 2 – The Rod of Moses used in judgment also speaks of redemption for us.
- 3 – But the River Jordan speaks of sanctification, and the death of Christ was for our sanctification.

And just here we want to give a passage of Scripture from Phillip’s book, which is not a translation but is an interpretation, for we feel that his interpretation of this particular passage will be helpful here. We turn to the sixth chapter of Romans – the first few verses:

Now what is our response to be? Shall we sin to our heart’s content and see how far we can exploit the grace of God? What a ghastly thought! We, who had died to sin – how could we live in sin a moment longer?

Now when did we die to sin?

Have you forgotten that all of us who were baptized into Jesus Christ were, by that very action, sharing in his death? We were dead and buried with him in baptism, so that just as he was raised from the dead by that splendid revelation of the Father’s power so we too might rise to life on a new plane altogether.

My friend, may I say to you that Christ went into death for you and me, and that is set before us here in the Book of Joshua:

And it came to pass, when all the people were completely passed over the Jordan, that the LORD spoke unto Joshua, saying, Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man, and command ye them, saying, Take here out of the midst of the Jordan, out of the place where the priests’ feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night. (Joshua 4:1-3)

This is something that they did. And here is what happened, as recorded in Joshua 4:9:

And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood; and they are there unto this day.

Twelve stones were put into the water of death. Those twelve stones were placed in Jordan to speak of the death of Christ.

Then in Joshua 4:8:

And the children of Israel did so, as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones out of the midst of the Jordan, as the LORD spoke unto Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over with them unto the place where they lodged, and laid them down there.

And the twelve stones taken out of Jordan and put on the west bank of the river speak of the resurrection of Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ died over nineteen hundred years ago, and Paul makes it clear in the sixth chapter of Romans that we are *identified* with Him in His death. It is too bad that the word “baptize” was transliterated and not translated. It is the Greek word *baptizo* and its primary meaning here has no connection with water. It speaks of identification. We are identified with Christ in His death, and when He died, my friend, He died for us. His death was our death. When He arose from the dead, then we arose from the dead. And we are joined today to a living Christ. It is only in the measure that we are joined to Him that you and I can enjoy all spiritual blessings. We trust that you realize that. We have become identified with Him!

Now, when the children of Israel crossed over the river, they became citizens of Palestine. They became forever identified with that land – so much so that today, even at this hour, they speak of the Jew in Palestine. And when he is out of that land, he is spoken of as the “wandering Jew.” Let us tie this fact up with another great fact: When you, my friend, came to Christ and accepted Him as your Savior, His death became your death and His resurrection your resurrection. When you “wander” from this identity, even briefly, think of the tragic meaning! Paul wrote a blessed truth to the Ephesians:

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath made us alive together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.
(Ephesians 2:4-7)

When He died, He died for your sin that you might have life; and when He came back from the dead, His life was then your life. Now you are joined to the living God. My friend, that is one of the great truths of the Word of God.

There were two and one-half tribes of the children of Israel that did not cross over Jordan, and there are two things about them which we want to bring to your attention:

- 1 – The *confession* of the two and one-half tribes;
- 2 – The *conduct* of the two and one-half tribes.

First of all, notice the confession of these tribes. Were I to choose a text for this sermon this would be it, and it is found in Joshua 22:10:

And when they came unto the borders of the Jordan, that are in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by the Jordan, a great altar to see.

Joshua, first of all,

(a) *commended* them for what they had done. They not only agreed to send their army to join the other nine and a half tribes in conquest, but they kept their promise to do so. They made good, and Joshua says here at the beginning of chapter 22:

...Ye have kept all that Moses, the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you. Ye have not left your brethren these many days unto this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God. (Joshua 22: 2, 3)

He not only commended them, but also

(b) *warned* them. This we find in verse 5 of chapter 22:

But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses, the servant of the LORD, charged you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.

And then Joshua

(c) *dismissed* them with a blessing – verse 6:

So Joshua blessed them, and sent them away; and they went unto their tents.

Up to this point all seemed well, but as they came to the River Jordan and started to cross over, they saw that this river was going to separate them from the other nine and one-half tribes. So they built an altar on the west side of the Jordan. It seems odd that while they dwelt on the east side of the river they built an altar on the west side.

Some scholars concluded for years that this altar must have been on the east side.

However, Dr. Groser found the ruins years ago, and the ruins are on the west side.

Now we know that the altar was built on the west side and we are told it was an altar “to see to.” That is a strange kind of altar to erect – an altar to see to. The literal translation is “an altar great to sight.” This altar was an imposing structure which could be seen from the east side. Do not forget that they put it on the west side and that they dwelt on the east side. It was visible at a great distance from any direction. But this meant to them that they could go to the east bank of the Jordan and look across at the altar on the west bank. Somehow this gave them a sense or feeling that they were joined to the other side. Thus to them this altar seemed to bridge the fact of their separation.

Years ago Bishop Horsley translated “a great altar to see to” as “a great altar in appearance.” It was not actually an altar. No sacrifice was to be offered on that altar at all. It was just an altar at which to look.

When the children of Israel heard of this altar which was erected only to be looked at and not to be used for sacrifice, the whole congregation of Israel gathered themselves at Shiloh to go up to war against them. This was a perfectly natural reaction, for they judged that the two and one-half tribes were beginning immediately to divide the nation. This you can see in verse 16:

Thus saith the whole congregation of the LORD, What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the LORD, in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the LORD?

Now if that altar had been built deliberately by them to divide the nation, such an act would have been a terrible thing.

No time was lost in reminding the two and one-half tribes of other times of tragedy in Israel's actions. Phinehas took them back to Baal-Peoo when Balaam had taught Balak to have the children of Israel intermarry with the Moabites and therefore bring in the worship of Baal. The children of Israel, knowing the judgment that had come upon them because of that, were aware of the words of Phinehas as he spoke of the stigma that still remained upon them as a people and nation. And speaking directly to them he said, "We want to know what you are doing in building this altar."

Now, my friend, the two and one-half tribes make it all very clear – they have a good explanation, as given in verses 21 and 22:

Then the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh answered, and said unto the heads of the thousands of Israel, The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know; if it be in rebellion, or if in transgression against the LORD, (save us not this day).

In effect, they said, "We did not build the altar in order to divide the nation at all."

In the present day, you know, my friend, sometimes we fundamentalists criticize other folk without knowing the facts. It is so easy to be fundamental and criticize!

Actually, the nine and one-half tribes were in error in coming down in such a hotheaded way against the two and one-half tribes. The reply of the two and one-half tribes was satisfactory to them and they accepted their statement.

The children of Israel called the altar "Ed" as we read in verse 34:

And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar Ed; for it shall be a witness between us that the LORD is God.

We have looked at many commentaries on this passage and we do not have a commentary in our library which condemns that altar, nor can we find one that agrees with what we are going to state. However, we are not alone in the interpretation which will be given here.

We want to look now at Altar Ed, the altar "to see to," the one that was wonderful in appearance and built by men who did not intend to divide the nation. Let us look at it, not taking just a cursory glance or making a surface survey, but looking carefully, if you please.

When God called these people out of Egypt and gave them His law, He gave them an altar upon which they were to make sacrifices. You will find again and again that He repeated the command to them that they were to make sacrifices only upon that altar. Read His command in Deuteronomy 12:27:

And thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, the flesh and the blood, upon the altar of the LORD thy God; and the blood of thy sacrifices shall be poured out upon the altar of the LORD thy God, and thou shalt eat the flesh.

And when they moved to the land of other peoples, God said to them that they were to destroy their altars. For this we must turn to Exodus 34:13, 14:

But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their idols. For thou shalt worship no other god; for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

God said to them (in effect), “You are not to have any other altar.”

When the time arrived that they were to come to the Jordan River and cross over, God gave definite instructions to Moses in Deuteronomy 27:4-7:

Therefore, it shall be when ye are gone over the Jordan, that ye shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in Mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaster them with plaster. And there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them. Thou shalt build the altar of the LORD thy God of whole stones, and thou shalt offer burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD thy God. And thou shalt offer peace offerings, and shalt eat there, and rejoice before the LORD thy God.

Then He said that they were to write the commandments upon the altar.

The two and one-half tribes never crossed over Jordan. They never had the privilege of offering a sacrifice at that altar at all. When they returned to their land and came to the Jordan River, they saw that the Jordan divided them, and the very altar (Ed) that they set up bespoke of the fact that they were divided. It was prima facie evidence that there was a division now in the nation and that there were two altars – it made way for the division later on.

Now they are divided, nine and one-half tribes and two and one-half tribes, east and west. *Later on it was north and south with ten tribes and two tribes.* And you will find confirmation of the division still later, when Jeroboam left the camp of Rehoboam and went into the northern tribes and said to them, “I will build an altar.” He built an altar and God sent a prophet to rebuke that altar. Jeroboam said to his men, “Take hold of him.” And his hand, which he put forth against the prophet, withered (see 1 Kings 13:4).

The altar was very important to God. The altar spoke of Christ. It was the place of sacrifice. And these two and one-half tribes in Joshua’s day had put up another altar. With this altar they had divided the nation. It was an altar that was “to see to.”

There are many altars such as the Altar Ed today. But the only place of unity for believers is around the person of Jesus Christ. We can meet with any man who will exalt Him. When we meet about His glorious person, we are already one.

Oneness is the thing about which He prayed in John 17:20-21:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

My friend, that is not a prayer which a church organization can answer. It cannot be answered by the machinery of the National Council of Churches. That prayer was the prayer of the Lord Jesus, and it has already been answered because He never prayed a prayer that was not answered.

And in this prayer He is not praying for church union. "I pray that they might be one, Father, as You and I are one." This prayer can have no reference to a church union. He is referring to the unity of the Trinity and the unity of those who have accepted Him – the body of believers, which is an organism and not an organization. The minute you trust the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, you are by His death and resurrection identified with Him and with the thousands who have taken this same blessed step and make up the body of believers. They are to meet around the glorious person of Christ. When you put up any other kind of altar today, it may be beautiful, it may be built around some person, or it may be built around an organization; but if it takes men away from the person of Christ, it is wrong.

The altar God commanded spoke of the death of Christ. But the altar that they erected was not an altar upon which to offer sacrifice – it was an altar "to see to." It was a bloodless altar.

Liberalism has divided the church, and it is liberalism that is schismatic today. They have erected an altar without blood. And the only place that we, as Christians, can meet is around the cross of Jesus Christ – we can meet any man there!

So we say to those who are liberal, "come, let's meet around the person of Christ and His shed blood for our sins."

The writer to the Hebrews said in 13:10-14:

We have an altar, of which they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered outside the gate. Let us go forth, therefore, unto him outside the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

And today any man who will come out of the camp and meet around the person of Christ and His death upon the cross, with him we will have unity today. There is only one altar. Oh, how tremendously important that is in this day. Men must see that they are not redeemed with silver and gold or any beautiful thing that has been made, but that they are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

Then Peter adds to this fact of our redemption that we are "born again."

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. (1 Peter 1:23)

And when we meet around the Word of God we have unity today, for the Bible exalts His glorious person.

We want now to examine the conduct of the two and one-half tribes. Our Lord says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits..." There is no such thing as thinking wrong and acting right. We have to think right before we can act right.

Let us move now from the days of the Altar Ed and the division of the tribes to the time when the Lord Jesus Christ was on earth. And we read that on one occasion when He was trying

to get away from the crowd, “They came over unto the other side of the sea [He is leaving the country west of the Jordan now] into the country of the Gadarenes” (Mark 5:1).

The Gadarenes – who are the Gadarenes? Well, they are the inhabitants of Gadara. That is not too much help in understanding. But who are the inhabitants of Gadara? Notice the word “Gad” is there, and it seems to me that we recall that Gad was one of the two and one-half tribes that remained on the wrong side of the River Jordan. Well, here they are – they are the Gadarenes!

When the Lord got over on that side, He came in contact with a man out of the tombs who was possessed with demons. Our Lord cast out the demons, and they went into a herd of pigs that was there, and the pigs were destroyed. We have a question to ask you in connection with this narrative. “What were the two and one-half tribes (the Gadarenes) doing in the pig business?” Joshua had said to them that they must be sure to keep the commandments of the Lord, and one of the commandments was that they should not eat pork. They should not have anything to do with pigs. Now here they are in the pig business, and the Lord destroyed the pigs.

Have you crossed over Jordan, or are you at this moment on the wrong side of Jordan and in the pig business?

Let us listen to Paul again as we turn to Colossians 3:1-4,

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

My friend, if you have crossed over Jordan and are buried with Him and raised with Him, you are to seek the things which are above. That will take you out of the pig business.

Paul continues to talk with the Colossians in verse 9,

Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.

Then in Titus 2:10:

Not purloining, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.

Then we often quote Titus 3:5:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

But we really ought not to stop there:

Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, that, being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men. (Titus 3:6-8)

There are a great many people right now who think that if your doctrine is pure your life can be impure. There are a great many people today saying that if your theology is straight your practice can be crooked, but that is not true. There are too many fundamentalists in our day who cannot be believed and cannot be trusted, they are not honest – those things ought not to be.

If you have come to that altar which speaks of the cross of Christ and have trusted Him as Savior, it is going to transform your life. If it does not, then you have not been to the altar!

Have You Crossed Over Jordan?

Someone says, “I would like to, but how am I to do it?” Well, let me tell you what you are to do.

- 1 – We are told here that we are to know that when He died, we died. When He went to the cross He died in our stead. We are to know that!
- 2 – We are to “Likewise, reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:11). You are to reckon on that.
- 3 – And then

Neither present your members unto sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves unto God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. (Romans 6:13 AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION)

Have you crossed over Jordan? You have when you come to Him and know that when He died, you died; when He was raised, you were raised; and now you are joined to Him and you are to reckon on that as you go out into life.

So, then, here is your first timid step into the stream called Jordan.
Come and let us read about it in Romans 10:9-10:

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

That is what He asks you to do. That is all. Trust Him. This is that all-important first step for you to take in crossing over Jordan.