

The Sending Out of Spies

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We are continuing in the first five chapters of the Book of Joshua, but I want to read two verses from the New Testament:

"By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were swallowed up. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed about for seven days" (Hebrews 11:29-30).

Now there is something here that does not appear on the surface, and it is that thing to which I have already referred as 'something quite remarkable'. If we had been writing the exact history of this story of the people of Israel, we would have put in a verse between Hebrews 11:29 and 30 and said: 'By faith they passed through the Jordan', but there is no such verse here. Evidently the Holy Spirit made a mistake! He forgot something, and jumped right from the Red Sea to Jericho. Do you believe that? Or do you believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures? Do you believe that the Holy Spirit governed the writing of the Bible? Do you believe that He deliberately left out this particular verse concerning Jordan?

In raising that question we touch something very vital - the question of whether the Holy Spirit dictated the Scriptures, and whether He really knew what He was doing in leaving out the reference to Jordan.

Now, one of the lessons that we Christians have to learn is that the Holy Spirit knows better than we do. That is a lesson that we shall be learning all through our lives. There is something more in the Scriptures than we recognize, but the Holy Spirit knows all about that, and He wrote the Scriptures with His own knowledge.

Why is the passage of Jordan not mentioned in Hebrews 11? Why is there this tremendous jump from the Red Sea to Jericho? The answer to that question is full of instruction, and is just this:

The Red Sea and the Jordan were not two distinct things, but the Jordan was the completion of the meaning of the Red Sea. In the mind of God the Jordan was in the Red Sea. The Red Sea is one part and the Jordan is the other part, and the two parts make one thing. There are some differences, but there are also some similarities. We will look at the similarities first.

In both the Red Sea and the Jordan death was destroyed, in principle. The Red Sea was only the carrying out of the death of the first-born in Egypt. In other words, the Red Sea was the triumph of life over death for the Lord's people. In Egypt the people of God were in death, but now they were in life. The Red Sea was the great evidence that death reigned in Egypt, but life reigned amongst the Lord's people. In the Red Sea the Lord's people went out from the realm of death into the realm of life, and the people who belonged to death were drowned. The same was true in the Jordan. We shall see that it was the great testimony of triumph over death. When the Jordan overflowed all its banks the Lord delivered His people from death. That was a similarity between the two things.

Then in both events there was a testimony to the virtue of the blood. The sprinkled blood of the Passover lamb was the signal for the Lord's people to be delivered from the realm of death. When the ark was moved into the Jordan the blood had been sprinkled upon the mercy-seat, and that blood was the testimony to victory over sin and death, a testimony to the virtue of the blood.

Then in both instances there was present authority over the world of darkness. You will remember that Moses lifted up his rod over the Red Sea, and that rod was always the symbol of Divine authority. By that authority the people were delivered from the power of darkness. Darkness reigned in Egypt, but with Israel there was the fight of the pillar of fire. There were the two authorities, the authority of darkness and the authority of light. When the Captain of the Lord's host met Joshua on the other side of the Jordan he represented the Divine authority by which these people were to be transferred from one kingdom to another. It was a matter of Divine authority in both the Red Sea and the Jordan.

There was one other thing that marked the two events, and that was the transfer from one kingdom to another - from the kingdom of Pharaoh and Egypt, representing the world, to the kingdom of God and His Christ in the land.

Those were the similarities. Now what about the differences?

We have said that Joshua and the Jordan were the completion of something that was begun at the Red Sea. Everyone can see the difference between Israel's life in the wilderness and their life in the promised land, and the movement of the ark of the testimony through the Jordan made complete what had begun in the Red Sea.

The second thing about the Jordan was that it represented the recovery of a lost testimony. The testimony of the Red Sea had been lost in the wilderness. The people who came through the Red Sea died in the wilderness, and that testimony was lost with them in the wilderness. When they were turned back from Kadesh-barnea to wander for forty years in the wilderness, there followed a story of failure and a lost testimony, but the Lord never gives up His purpose and He completed in a new generation what had been begun in the first. The Jordan makes good what has been lost in the wilderness.

You must be very patient while I lay the foundation for the real message! The crossing of the Jordan makes real what God really intended for His people. Now, you see, we have double movements. There were two seas crossed, and the second repaired the damage of the first. The second made victory where the first had only resulted in defeat. Now try to hold on to that for a little while.

There were two other things that happened. On the surface they looked the same, but they were fundamentally different, and that is the two occasions on which spies were sent out. This is very important and instructive for our spiritual life. The first sending out of the spies was a movement by man. Moses refers to this in Deuteronomy 1:22: "And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, Let us send men before us, that they may search the land for us, and bring us word again of the way by which we must go up." In my Bible I have put a red circle round a very little big word, and I think that little big word is the key to the whole thing: "And ye... every one of you... said, Let us...". 'Ye - you - us.' The people decided on this and Moses acceded to their wish. Sometimes, you know, the Lord does have to say: 'All right! Go ahead!' because He knows quite well that we will not accept anything else. When the people of Israel said to Samuel "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5), Samuel warned them: 'This does not come from the Lord, but from yourselves. You had better be careful what you are doing!' But they said: "Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations." Samuel said: 'All right, then. I will accede to your wish and do as you say' - but it was the worst day's work that Israel ever did! We know the terrible disaster and tragedy of Saul.

So the people came and said: 'Send out men.' Moses accepted, and the Lord permitted. There was a big question behind this act of the people, and that question was whether the Lord was as good as His word. The Lord had said that He would bring them into the land. He had said it to Abraham four hundred years before, and He had said it to this people. 'Let us send men before us..!' - in other words: 'Let us see whether it can be done. Let us see whether the Lord is as good as His word.' That was experimenting with God, and putting Him to the test.

Do you see that this was the whole basis of this long book of Deuteronomy? In this long book everything in this people's history was being gone over again, and Moses was saying again and again: 'That was wrong... that was wrong... that was wrong. Now you must put it all right.' What is the lesson of this first sending out of the spies? It is the tragedy which results from man taking God's things into his own hands. It was the people who took the direction in this matter. It was an act of self-determination and did not in the first place, come from God.

We are preparing the way for the second sending out of the spies. When the first generation had died in the wilderness and the new generation was ready to go over into the land, Joshua sent out spies. Is the thing wrong again? Is Joshua just doing what they did on the first occasion? The first was of man. The second is of the Lord. but there is a big difference. When the Lord directed Joshua to send spies over into the land, it was not because He did not know what was over the other side of Jordan. He knew all about the nations in the land, and all about Jericho and the other built-up cities. He did not send these spies because He wanted to know Himself. Note this very great fundamental difference between the two occasions:

In the first place, the Lord was dealing with a very different kind of people. This was a people of faith and not of unbelief, and it was perfectly safe for Him to bring a truly consecrated people into fellowship with Him in His power. You see, if the first had succeeded the people would have said: 'We have done it', and would have drawn all the glory to themselves. But this people was a very deeply disciplined people. All the self-life had been knocked out of them and the Lord could bring them into fellowship with His supreme power. This second generation could have said at this time: 'Well, we did that once before and remember the tragedy! We are not going to do it again'; but through experience they had learned a very deep lesson - that of ourselves we can do nothing, but if the Lord says it, then we can go forward. All that is gathered up in the ark, and the ark in the midst of the Jordan speaks of the end of the self-life and the beginning of the Christ-life.

Before I go on with that, let me point out something else. It is possible to do a right thing in a wrong way, and disaster follow. Sometimes the Lord calls upon us to do something on a right basis which would be disastrous on any other basis. This is one of the lessons that we Christians have to learn. The natural man can take the right things into his own hands, and only tragedy results. We meant it to be right. We had the good intention and did not mean to do wrong, but we did it. We chose the time for doing it, decided on the way to do it, and took it into our own hands. The result was that a right thing, done by the natural man, turned out wrong. You see, in the end it proved that it was not a wrong thing to send out spies, but it was a matter of whether man took it into his own hands, or whether it really came from the Lord. Very often, like Israel, when we have done something from ourselves which we think is for the Lord, we have to wait a very long time before it turns out well.

If you do not understand that, do not worry about it. If you are going on with the Lord you will learn it sooner or later. There will be things in your life about which you will say: 'If only I had waited for the Lord! If only I had been patient! If only I had got it from the Lord all this time would not have been lost!' Remember, that is one of the important lessons that has to be learned before you can go out of the wilderness into the land.

We will read from Joshua 4 verses 1-7:

"And it came to pass, when all the nation were clean passed over Jordan" (I like that phrase! Get your hand tightly on it - "clean over Jordan!") "that the Lord spake unto Joshua, saying, Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man, and command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and carry them over with you, and lay them down in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night. Then Joshua called the twelve men, whom he had prepared of the children of Israel, out of every tribe a man: and Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of Jordan, and take you up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel: that this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall say unto them, Because the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever."

You will notice that Joshua also took twelve stones from the land and put them into the bed of the Jordan. These two sets of twelve stones represent the cost of going right on with the Lord into His full purpose. The twelve stones representing the Lord's people in the bed of the Jordan said that this people had died for ever with Christ. To use a New Testament phrase, they said: "Ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3).

You can almost hear those stones talking! They are saying: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I." The self-life has been buried. The twelve stones on the land say: "Nevertheless I live, but it is no longer I, but Christ." Paul said: "We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him by the likeness of his death, we shall be also by the likeness of his resurrection" (Romans 6:4,5), and: "We thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him" (2 Corinthians 5:14,15).

You see, the cost, the inclusive cost, is that we are, in the death of Christ, separated from the old self-life. That self-life, which has been our undoing in the wilderness, is now left behind. It is buried where the ark stood, and henceforth it is not the self-life; it is everything for Christ.

The cost, then, is the cost of ourselves. Sometimes we sing: 'Here, Lord, I give myself away' - but are we quite sure that we really have given ourselves away? That is God's mind and attitude toward us. It is absolute, so far as He is concerned, but as far as we are concerned it has to be a crisis, something of one day, when we say: 'This very day I accept fully the end of my self-life.' But perhaps you say: 'Well, I did that, but this self is always coming up again. I have something that I love very much, and the Lord puts His finger on it and says, 'I want that'.' Do you think this is a new crisis of Jordan? No, this is not a new Jordan. The Lord simply says: 'That was included in Jordan. Did you really mean what you said at Jordan?' and we have to say: 'Yes, Lord, when I was baptized I said good-bye to the self-life. You can have that.' Jordan was an inclusive crisis.

But the Jordan is also a continuous experience, a progress as well as a crisis.

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You notice what the Lord said about those stones on the land? "When your children ask in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones?" what is the answer? Let us put the answer in modern terms. The children say: 'Why do you live this separated life? Why don't you do things that other people do, and why do you do things that other people do not do?' You know that those are questions asked by children. 'You are so different from other people. You don't do what they do. You do not go to the things that they go to. You do this and that, which other people do not do. What do you mean by these stones?' What is the answer? 'The Lord has done a very great thing in my life. He has changed my entire world of interests. He has given me another world.' The children ought to see it in the parents, not in stones. Peter says: "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house."

And the last word is: "And they are there, unto this day." Those words are often used in the life of Israel, and it is only a way of saying: 'And that stands for ever.' Our union with Christ in death and resurrection must be something that goes right on to the end of our history.

May we all have a testimony that makes other people say: 'What do you mean by this?!'