

Rolled Away

What kind of a general in his right mind, camped in enemy territory on the brink of going into battle, requires his whole army to be circumcised?? (See Joshua 5) Earlier, at the beginning of the book of Joshua, the children of Israel were camped on the east side of the overflowing Jordan river. Moses, who had led them for forty years of wilderness wandering was dead and had appointed Joshua to take the mantle of responsibility for leadership.

In short order, he began to instruct the people and "...they answered Joshua, saying, "All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you. Only the LORD your God be with you, as He was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your command and does not heed your words, in all that you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and of good courage." (Josh 1:16-18)

It wasn't long before the willingness of the troops to follow their new leader was put to the test. But the interesting thing is not so much that they were willing to go through with the circumcision on the eve of battle; rather, it's the fact that they needed to do so at all. Now, the Bible explains, "...this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: All the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt. For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised." (Josh 5:4,5)

Now, this is truly bewildering. Consider that some 40 years earlier

as recorded in Exodus 4, in sending Moses back to Egypt to lead his people out, God met him along the way and threatened to kill him if his wife did not circumcise their two sons. She was infuriated, but she complied. Then in giving the law to the people, the Lord confirmed the requirement of this practice, which started with Abraham, when in Exodus 12 He made clear the necessity of circumcision in order to celebrate the Passover. Even foreigners who wanted to celebrate it had to be circumcised.

So what in world happened? You mean to tell me that a whole generation who grew up in the wilderness and who celebrated the Passover annually (as Num 9:4,5 makes clear) just blew off one of the most central and ancient laws. Did Moses just blow it off too?? Did the Lord show tolerance of this while at the same time instructing them to use drastic discipline in the other aspects of the law? I mean this represented 40 years of overt disobedience to God's command. This was a blatant desecration of the Passover year after year. Did a whole generation simply 'not get the memo'?

There is really only one plausible explanation – the Lord allowed it in order to give us a lesson and I submit that it is a prophetic one -- a picture-lesson that may startle and inspire you. Let me explain.

First, a little history. Forty years earlier, Moses led them out through the Red Sea. Therein, they were separated from Egypt, a type of the world in scripture. Some people point to this event as a picture of salvation, but I don't think that's the primary point. They refer to 1 Cor 10:1,2 which says, "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,..." In this passage,

Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to avoid idolatry noting that even though the host of Israel was separated from Egypt, they lusted and became idolatrous and as a result incurred the wrath of God.

We as Christians have been separated, if you would, from the world as well and some will add that we as believers can wander in a period of wilderness-like experiences until we enter the promised land of heaven or when we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I don't disagree, but I don't believe that's the principle point of the picture. Remember, the key to prophecy, whether in prose, praise or picture, is the Jewish people not the gentile church. Some point to the word baptism in the verse however the baptism of Moses is not a symbol of salvation any more than the baptism of John.

I suggest that it is rather symbolic of the separation of the Jewish people from the world. Clearly, the Jews have always considered themselves a separate people and the rest of the world has agreed. It all started with Abraham who was called out of world so to speak around 2000 BC and up to the time of Christ, it spanned 40 generations as cited in Matthew chapter one.

The men who came out of Egypt were indeed circumcised, but over the course of the wandering in the wilderness for 40 years they, as a group, became uncircumcised. Then, they came at last to the place of the crossing on the east side of the Jordan. This was the same place, in fact, where John the Baptist later baptized Jesus, immersing Him under the water. You may recall that John, somewhat dumbfounded said, "I should be baptized by You!" But Jesus replied, "Permit it to be so now,

for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." (Mat 3:15)

At this point, Joshua chapter three picks up the story. "Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they set out from Acacia Grove and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they crossed over. So it was, after three days, that the officers went through the camp; and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it." Josh 3:1-3

For many years, Bible scholars have shown how the ark of the covenant is a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus. Thus, in type, we have a scene wherein the people are told to follow the symbol of Jesus. The passage continues, "Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way before." (Josh 3:4 emphasis mine)

Anyway, Joshua then told the priests to carry the Ark into the Jordan river. Now, this gets interesting because the name Jordan means "descender" and it descends into the Dead Sea. As such, it has long been known to be a picture of death or sin leading to death.

But here in Joshua, as the priests who are carrying the Ark, the type or picture of Christ, entered the river, something supernatural happened – "So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its

banks during the whole time of harvest), that the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan." (Josh 3:14-16 emphasis mine)
Supernaturally, the river was immediately 'swallowed up' – the water stopped far upstream, all the way up at a place called **Adam!**

Can you see it? The picture is perfect. That's why Jesus insisted on being baptized in that very spot. When Christ died for us on Calvary (as the Ark entered the river) sin and death (the Jordan) was "swallowed up" in victory (1Cor 15:54) all the way back to Adam! All the way back to the time when mankind first sinned and died. (I'll get to the Zaretan part momentarily.)

As a consequence, all the people crossed over on dry ground – death lost its sting (1Cor 15:55) – and they entered the promised land of God's Kingdom. Isn't this beautiful?!

But there's more. Just as Jesus told His disciples to follow Him, Joshua told the Israelites to follow the Ark. But they were told to follow it specifically from a distance of "about 2000 cubits". Now, I will suggest that this could be a prophetic illustration of the Jews following Christ in fulfillment of Romans 11:25-27 about 2000 years after Christ's death and resurrection. Paul wrote in that passage, *"For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:*

"The Deliverer will come out of Zion,

And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." (emphasis mine)

So the time in which God worked in and through the Jewish people was about 2000 years (Abraham to Christ) and the time He worked in and through the Church is the same – about 2000 years. See Pro 11:1 and Pro 16:11.

But there's still more. Back in Joshua, we read that the day they did this crossing was the 10th day of the first month which was the day specified in the law that each man was to choose for himself and his family a spotless lamb in advance of the Passover. Remember, this is prophetic through and through, and it is specific to the Jewish people not the mostly gentile church.

So the Jewish people miraculously crossed over the Jordan on dry ground and camped at Gilgal. *"At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time." So Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins."* (Josh 5:2,3) *"So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed. Then the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you."* (Josh 5:8,9 emphasis mine)

To appreciate this last statement, we need to do two word studies. First, we'll look at the term "rolled away". Its first mention is in Genesis 29 and is used referring to the rolling away a stone so that waters would gush forth which speaks prophetically to the flow of "living waters" – i.e. the Holy Spirit. Additionally, pertinent to Christ, it is recorded in Mat 28:2, Mk 16:4 and Lu 24:2 that the stone covering Christ's sepulcher was rolled away by an angel to reveal the empty tomb – to show that Christ had risen.

So on this day of being circumcised after 40 years of disobedience, there was a "rolling away" that points forward in time to a fountain of the Spirit and the revealing of the risen Messiah.

Do we have prophetic scriptural support for this? You bet:

Zech 13:1 says, *"In that day (the last days) a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness."* And,

Zech 12:10 says, *"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."*

The prophet Zechariah proclaimed the time in the last days when the Jewish people would be provided a fountain for sin and uncleanness receiving the Spirit of grace and have revealed the One whom they pierced – Jesus. Remember that name Zaretan? The city next to Adam? The Jordan was heaped up "far away" all the way back to Adam which is next to Zaretan. What do you think the name Zaretan means – yep, pierced. What a wonderful prophetic picture! Not only does this event portray the swallowing up of death and sin all the way back to the first sinner, the first Adam; but, it also speaks to the revealing of the last Adam, Jesus Christ (see 1 Cor 15:45) who was pierced for us.

Psa 22:16 prophetically quotes the Messiah,

"For dogs have surrounded Me;

The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me.

They pierced My hands and My feet;" Rev 1:5-7 says of Jesus, *"To Him who loved us and washed us from*

our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen."

Now for the next word, "reproach"; it is first mentioned in scripture in Gen 30:23 where Rachel, after being barren for so long, finally has a baby (Joseph, who is also a well known type of Christ) and says that God has taken away her reproach. Therefore, we can associate in type this term with the reproach of barrenness and specifically barrenness linked to being without Christ.

This brings to mind the scripture passage wherein Christ, being hungry, came to the fig tree (a well accepted symbol of Israel) and finding no fruit on it, said, *"Let no fruit grow on you ever again."* (Mat 21:18) and indeed, Israel has been spiritually barren for the last 2000 years or so.

But God has pictured that the time will come when all Israel will again be circumcised. Now, you may think, 'Wait a minute. It is still the Jewish custom to circumcise the male children; always has been.' Yes, but that's not the circumcision this event portrays.

Moses wrote in summation of the law:

"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good? Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, also the earth with all that is

in it. The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer." (Deut 10:12-16)

And in speaking of the last days, he recorded:

"Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." (Deut 30:1-6)

And the prophet Jeremiah, pointing to the time of God's wrath, wrote: "If you will return, O Israel," says the LORD,

"Return to Me;

And if you will put away your abominations out of My sight,

Then you shall not be moved.

And you shall swear, 'The LORD lives,'

In truth, in judgment, and in righteousness;

The nations shall bless themselves in Him,

And in Him they shall glory."

For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem:

"Break up your fallow ground,

And do not sow among thorns.

Circumcise yourselves to the LORD,

And take away the foreskins of your hearts.

You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, (Jer 4:1-4)

Just as the original Jews who left Egypt were circumcised, the original forefathers had saving faith – Abraham, Isaac and Israel. But, separated from the world and under the law of Moses, their descendants became uncircumcised -- faithless, dedicated to works, walking in the reproach of spiritual barrenness. And though they have, over the centuries, kept the Passover in a manner of speaking, that is, they've held to their customs and law, as with the children of Israel in the wilderness, it has all been illegitimate.

But it has now been about 2000 years (cubits) since the day that the ark (Jesus) cleared the way past death and sin. Therefore, the day is upon us in which their condition will change.

Yes, the days are upon us in which Joshua (which is the same name as Jesus) will fulfill this prophetic picture and figuratively lead Israel across the Jordan on dry ground. That is, He will extend His saving grace to them. The stone of their blindness (see Rom 11:7-10) will be **rolled away** and they will see the resurrected Christ. As a consequence their hearts will be circumcised – radically changed. Saved by faith, they will receive a marvelous outpouring of the Holy Spirit and once again bear much good fruit!