



**Looking Inwards** (15 mins)  
*Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



**Looking Outwards** (15 mins)  
*Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



**HG64: Inhabiting The Promised Land (3/7)**  
*Jordan: Crossing Over The River*

**Joshua 3:1-17**

**Home Group Study Notes**

12<sup>th</sup> February 2012 - Revd Tom Loh



**PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION BEFORE THE MEETING!**

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.*



**Welcome** (10 mins)  
*Ice Breaker*

If you inherited a large piece of land in the beautiful Essex countryside and a billion pounds to spend on it – what would you create with it?



**Looking Upwards** (10 mins)  
*Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





## Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1) The Israelites were told by God to completely destroy everyone who lived in the Promised Land when they entered. How does this fit with a God who claims to be loving and forgiving?

2) Why must the Ark of the Covenant lead the way across the Jordan, and not the Israelite warriors?

3) The miracle of the Jordan River crossing is similar to that of the parting of the Red Sea. What is the spiritual significance of passing through water in the Bible?

But that would be like settling for desert and sand, when a land flowing with milk and honey lies open before us.

As Christians we are not settlers we are sojourners. The world should be able to look at the church and conclude that we have no stake in this passing age; that we are a people who have a hope that far outstrips the empty promises and temporary hopes of the world around us – whether it be fame, fortune, material possessions, beauty, power, influence, or respect. If the Israelites had set up a permanent home in the wilderness, would they have even bothered following Joshua into the Promised Land? Worse still, would the Canaanites have even known their end was coming?

Jesus took our place under the judgement of God, and in so doing he has purchased a Promised Land for us all. We need no longer fear God, nor the future. We are free people. We need not try to prove ourselves worthy by how good we are. For, no matter how good we think we are, we cannot cross Jordan's "Stormy Banks" on our own, nor take hold of our eternal future in Canaan's "fair and happy land" by ourselves. It always amazes me how quickly as Christians we think we are saved by how good or worthy we are. No, just as the Israelites stood a thousand yards back and watched the Lord perform salvation, so we must stand 2000 years on from Jesus' crucifixion and look back as the Lord God performed salvation on our behalf.

When Joshua led the people of God into the Promised Land each person was given a piece of land as their share of the inheritance (Deut 31:7). What a wonderful hope that must have been for the people as they journeyed through the harsh wilderness – to know that God had a place just for them, to dwell with him and with their fellow people. So too, Jesus will lead us into the Promised Land to inherit the whole earth: "*an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you*" (1 Peter 1:3-6).

I often spend time dreaming of what that future will be like. Claire and I often look at lovely country homes and allow ourselves to dream big for when we enter into our New Creation inheritance – often that helps us to stop coveting in the here and now! Best of all though, we will be with Jesus, and the Father. We will be daily filled with the Spirit of God, and free to enjoy all the wonders of created life in our renewed and resurrected bodies, knowing that it will never end. Praise the Lord. Come Lord Jesus. **Amen.**

We're told that the waters of the Jordan were in flood season at this time because it was the season of harvest, v.15, and so were at their most powerful and dangerous. However, when the Ark enters the waters, rather than being swept away, the waters stop flowing and heap up forming a kind of dam. And so the people are safe to cross over on dry ground without even getting wet!

What are we to learn from this? Simply that the Lord God stands between the people and judgement so that they can pass safely through. This is perhaps the deepest teaching of the Bible: The living God, who created all things, lays down his life on behalf of his people. Too often the world assumes that if a god exists at all, he must be served and obeyed for fear of punishment and death. But the God of the Bible is the complete opposite. He serves the people and takes our punishment so that we can live. Interestingly the passage tells us that the waters stopped flowing at a point upstream at a town called Adam. The keen Bible student will remember that because of Adam's sin the human race was thrown out of Eden towards the east (Gen 3:24). In Joshua 3, the people of God are now returning westward to the Promised Land.

As one writer puts it: *"The judgement that flowed down from Adam, blocking our return to Eden, can be overcome by the LORD who sits enthroned on the 'mercy seat' (the lid of the Ark)."*

Why is it important that the people pass on dry ground without getting wet, verse 17? Because Israel is physically acting out spiritual redemption teaching us, and them, that not a drop of judgement would fall upon any who sheltered under the Lord, and who stood firm on the Rock of Israel. The ancient people of God learnt important lessons through their experiences that would prepare them for the coming of Christ. When Christ did come and was lifted up on the cross with his arms stretched wide, he held back the waters of God's judgement like a dam. All who sheltered under the cross would pass through God's judgement on safe ground. As Isaiah says, *"the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed"* (Isaiah 53:5). This is what the living God is like, and he is altogether worthy of our love. When Christ died on the cross the waters of God's judgement were in full flood. God poured out the fullness of his wrath when Christ died, in order to bring in a harvest of redeemed people.

And so the whole nation of Israel was saved, verse 17. Not one was lost. The Israelites were not saved because they were righteous nor because they were better than the other nations, but simply because they trusted the Lord God. So too we are not saved because of our own righteousness or goodness, but by the faithfulness, love and commitment of the true Joshua, Jesus Christ, our truest saviour and the Captain of Salvation.

### **Crossing the Jordan – A Day Still to Come**

As Christians today it is important we do not forget that we live in the same moment as the ancient people did - standing on the banks of the River Jordan, waiting for our Joshua to lead us into the Promised Land of the renewed earth. It can be tempting for us to imagine that all we have is the here and now, as if all we have is this side of death.

4) Joshua is the Hebrew name for Jesus, what parallels can you see between Joshua and Jesus?

5) The theme of entering the Promised Land is picked up in the New Testament by Jesus when he says: *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"* (Matthew 5:5). What is the inheritance he speaks of, and how can a person inherit it? C.f. Romans 8:17.

6) How does the certainty of the New Heavens and the New Earth impact our today? C.f. 1 Peter 1:3-9; 1 Peter 2:13-14; 2 Peter 3:10-15.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## HG64: Inhabiting The Promised Land (3/7) *Jordan: Crossing Over The River*

Joshua 3:1-17

### Home Group Sermon Notes

12<sup>th</sup> February 2012 - Revd Tom Loh

#### **Crossing the Jordan – A Day of Reckoning**

For many people the book of Joshua is problematic. It is filled with violence, blood and war. It can give the impression that God is not only capricious, but also bloodthirsty and merciless. However, if we've read the Bible carefully we can see that the living God is both just, and merciful. It is important to remember that this is not a story of the 'good guys' versus the 'bad guys', nor is it a story about God being biased towards one race against another. It is simply a story of God's judgement upon wickedness. In Deuteronomy 9:5 we read: "*It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations...*"

The nations and peoples who inhabited the Promised Land practiced all manner of wickedness. Some of the gods they served required them to sacrifice their children to the fire (Deut 18:9-13). Whenever we see injustice, cruelty and evil in the world a part of us demands justice. For the Living God who created the world, it causes Him great pain to see what we have made of it. It's not only the wars, the corruption and the violence that disturbs Him, but also the every day evil that resides in all our hearts – the anger, the pride, and the lusts that are so deeply rooted in our being. The Canaanite people, in many ways, are no different from the rest of us. They served gods of wood and stone, and sacrificed children at their bidding, but in modern society we serve our own gods of pleasure, luxury, and power (and all too often our children are sacrificed before the altar of our selfish needs). Neither were the Israelites a righteous people. They too were often wicked, ungrateful and rebellious before the Lord.

As the people stand on the banks of the River Jordan the day of reckoning is finally upon the inhabitants of Canaan. But it is not as if they were without plenty of warning. For 450 years the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, and for another 40 years the people wandered the desert. Thus, for almost 500 years the Lord God was patient with the Canaanite nations, waiting that they might repent. The Canaanite nations knew they were squatters in God's land and that the Lord had redeemed his people from Egypt (Joshua 2:8-11) but they did nothing. Now their time was up. However, even as we learnt from our last study in Joshua 2, the Lord God would spare any who chose to repent and would welcome any who wanted to join His people. It is a sobering reminder that Rahab and her family were the only ones.

Time and again the Bible reminds us of the stubbornness of the human heart. So often we wait until it is too late – Noah and the flood, Moses and the Egyptians, Joshua and Jericho, Jesus and the Rulers, and even today many do not welcome the message that they need to be saved. Jesus himself gives us a sobering reminder: "*As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.*" A day of reckoning is coming soon when Jesus will return to claim his Promised Land, and remove all those who continue in their active resistance. But today, just as then, the Lord is eager that none should perish but all be saved.

#### **Crossing the Jordan – A Day of Salvation**

As the people stand on the banks of the river Jordan their hearts would have been in their mouths. To take the Promised Land from the Canaanites is humanly impossible. They are a nation of giants, fortified and strong, and the Israelites are nothing more than a weary band of travellers. Crossing the Jordan River is a daunting enough task on its own. But the people are confident. Why? Because the Lord God is with them and he will do it (Joshua 1:16-18).

The crossing of the Jordan is an extremely important theological event. In the Bible water (especially salt water) is all about judgement and death, and crossing it is always symbolic of passing through death to new life. Time and again the Bible teaches this truth, that glory always comes after suffering (1 Peter 1:10-12). The creation itself was born out of the dark waters of the abyss in Genesis 1:1-3, Noah and his family were saved through the judgement of water to a renewed earth, the Hebrew people were saved by passing through the Red Sea, and now the people of God will be saved from the wilderness into the Promised Land by passing through water (it is no accident that Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan before he began his work of redemption). Interestingly many hymn writers pick up on this imagery, e.g.

*On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,  
And cast a wishful eye  
To Canaan's fair and happy land,  
Where my possessions lie. (Samuel Stennett, 1787).*

Even the songwriter Jonny Cash wrote a song called "Waiting on the Far Side Banks of Jordan" about waiting for his loved one the other side of death. Thus, Biblically speaking, to attempt to cross the Jordan in your own strength would mean certain death. That is why we read in Joshua 3 that the Ark of the Covenant must go ahead of the people and lead the way across the Jordan. The Ark of the Covenant is the throne of God and represents the Lord, teaching the people that only He can bring the people safely through death into the Promised Land. I love the way the people are told to stand a thousand yards back from the Ark, verse 4, signifying that they have absolutely nothing to do with the miracle that is about to occur. Only the Lord can save, and we simply stand back and watch.