

## Crossing Over, a Brief Meditation

There are two crossings over (water) recorded in the Old Testament that are important to us as Christians today: the crossing of the Red Sea, and the crossing of the Jordan River. The accounts recorded in the Old Testament were written for our learning, “*that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*” (Rom. 15:4). We find God’s instruction for our conduct in these principles of Scripture because the Bible is not a book of rules, but a book of moral principles and doctrinal teachings. God has graciously provided us with (moral) pictures to help us understand His mind in all things.

### The Red Sea:

What does it mean to us? Why is it important to Christians?

First, let us look at the setting of the crossing of the Red Sea. (Exodus 13 to 15). Israel was between a rock and a hard place. Previously they had spoiled the Egyptians by “*borrowing ... jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment...*” (Ex. 3:22). The Egyptians were very anxious that the children of Israel to leave. They had just gone through the plagues that ruined the land and their crops. Now had lost their first born and the firstborn of their cattle. They did not want to lose more.

After the Israelites left Pharaoh changed his mind. He decided to go after them and bring them back. After all, who would do all of the work? When Israel saw the Egyptian army behind them, they were afraid. It appeared that Moses had led them into an impossible situation—the Red Sea in front of them, the Egyptian army behind and the impenetrable wilderness on either side. What next? Well, God was next. He dried up the Red Sea over night so that the children of Israel could cross over on dry land. They did not have to slog through the mud but crossed over on dry ground. You can see that after some 2.7 million people crossed over, the ground would be quite well packed. The Egyptians evidently thought so and drove their chariots into the Red Sea. But God took the wheels off of their chariots, they bogged down probably in the mud and God allowed the water to return drowning them all. The 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of Exodus records the first song in the Bible. It is a song of redemption. In Scripture, singing is very often found in connection with redemption.

What does the crossing of the Red Sea mean for us? We know that it pictures the

death of the Lord Jesus Christ for us at Calvary. But we also have the New Testament reference to the crossing in Romans 6 and Colossians 2. The subject there is Baptism. Notice the emphasis in Romans 6 which is the essence of baptism—*going down into the waters of death*. Let us consider this crossing as it suggests principles relating to baptism.

## **What is Baptism?**

What is Baptism?... Why is it important? ...Who should be Baptized and when? When we ask “what is baptism?”, we don’t just mean the act of being immersed in water. What does it signify for Christians? Let us consider the pictures in the Old Testament. When the children of Israel left Egypt, they did so by crossing the Red Sea. When they crossed the Red Sea, they saw the ‘waters of judgment’ standing in a wall beside them on either side. I imagine that there was an element of fear to see those walls standing there—they may have appeared as though they could come down and drown God’s people. The Israelites had to trust God and His Word. There was no other way out, and God had said that He would take them through on dry ground—it must be exactly as He said. The truth of God’s Word never depends on my belief, but my belief must depend fully and completely on God’s Word.

He separated the Red Sea (waters of judgment) and by faith they entered in (Heb. 11:29) with all of their families and all of their cattle on dry land. There were obviously very little children who were too young to understand what was happening. Yet, their parents did not ask them if they wanted to come along. There was even a company of unbelievers who entered in with them. (See Num. 11:4-10). Baptism is not salvation, so unbelievers may be baptized making a false profession of faith in Christ. I have a baptismal certificate which states that I was made a member of the body of Christ through baptism. That is not the way that I became a member of the body of Christ. I didn’t become a child of God until many years later when I heard and, by the grace of God, believed the gospel.

What then does baptism have to do with crossing the Red Sea? What separated Israel from the wilderness? How were they to leave Egypt?—through the Red Sea. What, we might ask, does Egypt mean to us since we see that Israel was so anxious to leave Egypt. Egypt is a picture of the *world in independence from God*. The land of Egypt does not depend on the rain from heaven for its crops. Everything that grows in Egypt is watered from the Nile River. Egypt had become merely a land of slavery for

Israel. We do not read that Israel had an altar for God in Egypt. We as believers must separate from *this present evil world* in its independence from God to be able to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Baptism as pictured in passing through the Red Sea then is being *identified with Christ's death for me*. (Romans 6). Through baptism, I publicly announce that I am not of this world. Baptism has, through death, taken me from Egypt (the world) and identified me with the Christ who died for me on the cross.

Suppose a man joined his country's army. No one can see that he is a soldier until he puts on a uniform. The uniform doesn't mean that he has been trained as a soldier, but still he is part of the army. When Israel crossed the Red Sea they still had much to learn, but by crossing the Red Sea they left Pharaoh and became identified with a new leader—Moses, the man of God. Now they were outwardly and publicly the people of God. We read of their murmurings along the way because they had not entered into the good of all that God had promised them and they would not see the total faithfulness of God until they entered the Land. But still, having crossed the Red Sea they had all been 'baptized' unto Moses (see 1 Cor. 10:1-9)

### **Why is baptism important?**

The reason that baptism is important is two-fold: First, a believer should not live 'in the world'; secondly, we cannot worship God, or remember the Lord in His death, if we are still 'part of the world'. There is no record in Scripture of an altar being built in Egypt. By this we see that Egypt (a type of the world) is not the place for worship. The blood of Christ put my sins away; the death of Christ put me away and the cross of Christ separates me from this present evil world. Baptism is very important in the sight of God and is a public, outward testimony of my new position in Christ. Remember that the crossing of the Red Sea did not bring them into the promised land —only into the wilderness. Romans chapter 6 deals with baptism thus: in verse 3 we read that "... *so many of us as were baptized unto Jesus Christ were baptized unto his death.*" ('unto' not 'into'\*).

\*We are not saved by baptism, baptized into Christ. We are saved through the value of His blood. But being saved we should be baptized *unto* Christ as Israel was baptized *unto* Moses in the cloud and in the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:2).

## Who should be Baptized and when?

Who then should be baptized? It is obvious from Scripture that every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ should be baptized. Such then may say 'I am not of this world. I have been cut off from the world and the judgment that is about to fall on it.' It appears that in the early church in Acts it was expected that a believer would be baptized as soon as they were saved (see Acts 2:38).

Who else should be baptized? Let us return to the picture of Israel crossing the Red Sea. Who crossed over? Just the adults and older children? What about the young children of the families. Did the parents say to their little ones; 'when you are old enough to understand the evils of Egypt, maybe God will deliver you too'. No! Moses said "*not an hoof shall be left behind*" (Exodus 10:26). Pharaoh had said (Exodus 10:24) "*Go ye, serve the Lord;...let your little ones also go with you.*" So they took their 'little ones' with them. What about us? Do we take our little ones with us out of this World? In 1 Cor. 7:14 we see the holiness of Christian households as setting them apart from this world. In Acts 16:15 and 16:32 we have examples of the baptism of Christian households. Both Lydia and the Jailer were baptized '*and their households*'. It was not a matter of each one understanding what was happening but taking holy ground for themselves and all their households. The baptism of Christian households places our children on holy ground—places them in the Christian house of profession (*great house*—2 Tim 2:20), in faith seeking the blessing of the Lord for them.

In 1 Corinthians 10 we read that they all were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea. Who are the all? Remember that only two adults who left Egypt, entered the land of Canaan—Caleb and Joshua. So, the *all* who were baptized unto Moses had to include the children from the very youngest amongst them.

We are not saying that we should baptize infants as is done as a rite of regeneration in church systems. However, 'members of a Christian household' may include an infant. We should be clear that those being baptized need to be a.) believers or b.) a member of a Christian household.

In a practical way, in correction and instruction we sometimes say to our children that something 'is not pleasing to the Lord'. If however they have not 'been taken out of the world' in baptism – this is really, technically not appropriate. For us to say to our children that something is not pleasing to the Lord, if they have never been taken out of the world and are still under the domination of Satan (who is pictured by Pharaoh),

is not correct. Of course it is 'correct' that disobedience is displeasing to the Lord. A dear, godly brother once said he was glad Christian parents were *inconsistent* on the point of requiring unbaptized children to follow Scripture: "*children obey your parents in the Lord*".. Baptism has nothing to do with salvation, but it does place the children of Christian parents on holy ground. We must trust the Lord that their repentance for sin and salvation, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ will follow. "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and **thy house***".

\*Note: Being baptized for the dead in 1 Cor. 15:29 is a picture of the Roman army which fought in lines. As a soldier in the front line fell in fighting one from the second line would step up and continue the battle. If there was no one to step up and fill the spot, the battle would be lost. Baptism in this verse is seen as a believer stepping in to fill the rank when another believer is taken home.

### Crossing the Jordan:

If baptism is 'identifying myself with the death of Christ for me', as seen in the crossing of the Red Sea, then what does the crossing of the Jordan mean?

Again let us look at the setting. The children of Israel have spent 40 years and 11 days in the wilderness. Why worry about the 11 days you ask? Well that is the time that it took them to get from Egypt to Kadesh-Barnea (Deuteronomy 1:19, Numbers 13-14). They could have entered into the land then, but did not because of unbelief. Because of their unbelief, God sent them into the wilderness for 38 years of wandering and two years of journeying, in total 40 years and 11 days. This is an example that shows God holds us responsible for our actions and there are consequences as another has said: "present and eternal consequences for each of our actions".

As they approached the Jordan River, after the 40 years in the wilderness, it was in flood stage (Joshua 3:15). Remember the Red Sea? Well, this time the waters of judgment would not be a problem. As the feet of the priests touched the water, the waters fled back to the city ADAM, (Joshua 3:15). The waters of the Red Sea were as waters of judgment standing on either side of them. The waters of the Jordan River were not in evidence at all. God removed them out of sight. "*As far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us*" (Psa. 103:12).

When Israel arrived at the Jordan God commanded them to do something. In obedience Joshua took some stones from the bottom of the river and built a monument of

12 stones (one for each of the tribes) in the riverbed. They also gathered up 12 stones out of the river bottom and carried them up to the opposite shore. There they built another monument. Only God would ever see the first monument when the waters of Jordan returned. All the people, however, would be able to see the second monument which built to remind them of their obligations to God. The wilderness was past, and blessing was before them. Not one thing of all that God had promised had failed.

Many Christians think of the ‘crossing Jordan’ as the physical death of a believer. It does not, however, picture going to heaven through physical death but rather, enjoying the good of our heavenly blessings while we are still living. Consider Galatians 2:20. *“I am crucified with Christ.”* That is the first set of stones placed in the river bed. *“Nevertheless I live,”* that is the second set of stones. *“But the life that I now live, in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”* Colossians 3 starts out with *“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above”*. Please also read Colossians 2 & 3.

What does all of this mean to me—a Christian? While the Red sea spoke of Baptism—my being identified with Christ’s death for me, the crossing of the Jordan speaks of my death with Christ. That is owning His Lordship in my life and walking in the newness of life, not doing my own will, but the will of Him who loved me, and gave himself for me (see Galatians 2:20, see also Colossians 2:12-15). It was after Israel crossed the Jordan that they came to realize the goodness of God. The children of Israel found out that the testimony of Caleb and Joshua was true, when they brought back their spy report, of the wonders of the land, and had encouraged them to enter. Now they had wasted 40 years in the wilderness. We should not delay crossing over Jordan by faith, by owning the Lordship of Christ in our lives and enjoying the goodness of God, seeing His power and faithfulness at work for us day by day.

The children of Israel had warfare once they entered into the land. If we wish to walk in the good of our heavenly blessings while we are still down here, then we will have conflict. (See Ephesians 6:12). Our warfare is spiritual while theirs was physical. *“Take unto you the whole armor of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand.”* (Ephesians 6:13) God has given us all that is needed to carry on this warfare, enjoying our heavenly blessings until He calls us home to Himself.

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