

CROSSING THE JORDAN

Joshua 3-4

The transition to this lesson is easily made through emphasis on the unwillingness of the Israelites to obey the Lord as the cause of their long stay in the wilderness. The lesson to be drawn from this is an obvious one for all classes. Then Joshua may be used as the actual connecting link, recalling his leadership of the fighting men throughout the wilderness journey and the story of the spies (Numbers 13-14), in which Joshua and Caleb alone trusted the Lord and gave wise counsel.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord can always give us power to go forward in the right way if we are not afraid to try.

The commandments are our guide and protection in every difficult decision.

Faith is essentially trust in the Lord.

A feeling of real enjoyment in doing right is the beginning of the regenerate state.

Notes for Parents

People have long seen that in the Bible the land of Canaan—the Holy Land or the Promised Land—is a picture of heaven, and that the Jordan River is a picture of the dividing line or boundary between this world and heaven. But we need to realize that heaven is not just a place where good people go when they die. It is a state in which truly good people live while they are in this world. In fact, if we have not reached this heavenly character before we die, we shall not be able to live in heaven after death.

There are stages in our spiritual journey in this life, just as there were stages in the journey of the children of Israel from Egypt to the Holy Land. We do not become heavenly people all at once.

And there are two dividing lines to be crossed in this journey. The first is the line between completely worldly living and the determination to obey the Lord. This is pictured in the Bible by the Red Sea. The second is the line between obeying the Lord because we know we ought to and obeying Him because we love to. This is the Jordan River. The wilderness journey of struggle and trials lies between.

Both the Red Sea and the Jordan River seemed impassable to the Israelites, but when they went forward boldly, the Lord opened the way for them. So it is with us. Our natural worldliness and selfishness make obedience to the Lord and especially any real enjoyment in obedience seem impossible. But we need to remember that “with the Lord all things are possible.” If we obey the commandments faithfully, the time will surely come when we pass over Jordan into a state of willing and joyful obedience which is heaven in this world as well as in the next. As we have told the Juniors in their notes, “I can’t” never gets us anywhere. Joshua was given two charges by the Lord and these charges are meant for every one of us. One was that he must always read and meditate upon the book of the law and do as it taught. The other was that he must be “strong and of a good courage.”

Primary

Stress the foolishness of the Israelites in not trusting and obeying the Lord, and the lesson which its result teaches us. The children will enjoy the story of the crossing of the Jordan from the Word, and should learn the names *Joshua* and *Jordan*. Read also the Lord’s charge to Joshua (Joshua 1:7-8). In covering today’s story, stress the fact that it was the ark containing the commandments which opened the way and held back the flood while they crossed. Stress also the importance of not being afraid to go forward in the right way.

You remember how the people rebelled against Moses and Aaron, through whom the Lord was leading and teaching them. They were traveling toward the Holy Land, which is sometimes called the *Promised Land* because the Lord had promised Abraham that it should belong to his descendants. If they had been willing

and obedient, they could have made the whole journey from Egypt to the Holy Land in a few months. But because they were so unwilling to obey, the Lord could not give them their promised land until all the people who were dissatisfied had died off. You know how often we lose things because we are foolish and will not mind our parents.

To what country were the Israelites traveling?

Do you know how long they were on the way altogether?

It was their constant murmuring and disobedience that held them back.

The Holy Land stands for a heavenly character. .

We cannot have a heavenly character until we learn to trust and obey the Lord.

Even Moses and Aaron were not wholly obedient and died in the wilderness.

Whom did the Lord appoint to be leader after Moses died?

What was the eastern boundary of the Holy Land?

In order to enter the Holy Land they had to cross the River Jordan. They reached it just at the time of year when the water was very high and was overflowing the fields on both sides of the river. Here was this great army of people with their wives and children and all their tents and their household belongings and their cattle—and they had no boats. What were they to do?

Who led the way into the river?

What were they carrying?

What happened?

What did Joshua set up in the midst of the Jordan?

What did he set up on the other side after they had all crossed?

Why did he set up these stones?

What was the name of the place where they set up the stones and camped?

The Lord will always help us if we have courage to do right, even when it looks hard.

Junior

With this class a little more should be done with the reason for the long stay in the wilderness. The figure of Joshua may be made central in this introduction. The whole emphasis in the story should be on the necessity of trust in the Lord, obedience to the commandments, and the courage to do right. If children of this age can be given the thought that yielding to temptation is cowardly and that doing right is brave, it will help them in their daily decisions.

Now we come to the story of how the Israelites actually entered the Holy Land. The murmurings and rebellions of the people had kept them in the wilderness for forty years. We often make it hard for our parents to do all they would like to do for us by not obeying them. There is a right way to behave, and it is always the best way for us in the end. The Lord had promised Abraham and Isaac and Jacob that the land of Canaan should belong to their descendants—this is why it is often called the Promised Land—but they were to be sure always to obey Him. The Lord promises us that we shall live forever in heaven if we will only obey Him. The land of Canaan, or the Holy Land, is a symbol of heaven. But heaven is not only a place where good people go after they die; it is a heavenly character in this world. People who obey the Lord are really living in heaven here because they have His unselfish love in their hearts and are not always thinking about themselves and what they want that they do not happen to have. So in the story of the Israelites the people who were always dissatisfied and rebellious could not enter the Holy Land.

Perhaps you remember the story (Numbers 13-14) of how Moses, at the command of the Lord, sent twelve men, one from each tribe, to “spy out” the Holy Land and come back and tell the people about it. All the spies reported that it was a wonderful land, but ten of them said the enemies in the land were so strong that they could not be overcome. Only two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, urged the people to go ahead and enter the land. They said that the Lord would be with them and give them the victory. But all the people listened to the ten and refused to try to take the land. So the Lord said all the people must stay in the wilderness until every one of the cowards was dead. Only Joshua and Caleb and the children and young people who had not been old enough at the time to have a vote in the matter should ever enter the Holy Land. Even Moses and Aaron were to die before they entered it. “I can’t” never gets us anywhere.

Moses was allowed to see the Holy Land. The last chapter of Deuteronomy tells us how, when the Israelites at the end of their

forty years of wandering reached their last encampment not far from the Jordan River, the Lord called Moses up to the top of Mount Nebo and showed him all the Holy Land spread out far below him. Then Moses died.

Joshua had been appointed by the Lord to lead the Israelites in their conquest of the Holy Land. Joshua was a fighting man. He had been the leader of the army all through the forty years in the wilderness. After the death of Moses the Lord gave Joshua a solemn charge. Read it in Joshua 1:6-9.

In the thirty-third chapter of Numbers you will find a list of all the encampments of the Israelites from the time they left Egypt to the time of our lesson for today. Verse 48 of that chapter gives their final stop in the wilderness: “And they departed from the mountains of Abarim, and pitched in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho.” From this encampment Joshua sent two men across the Jordan to spy out the immediate country and especially the walled city of Jericho, which would be the first obstacle in their way after they crossed the river. When the men came back, the people advanced to the edge of the Jordan and remained there until the third day looking at the river which barred their further progress, for they were a great host of people with many children and all their tents and household goods and cattle—and they had no boats. You notice, however, that this time there is no statement that they were doubtful or afraid.

What was the condition of the river at this time? (verse 15)

Who were to go first?

What were they to carry.

What was in the ark?

What happened when the foot of the first priest touched the brink of the river?

Where did the priests bearing the ark stop?

What did Joshua set up in the middle of the river bed?

What did he order one man from each tribe to do?

Who were the last people to come up out of the river?

What happened as soon as they had crossed?

What did Joshua do with the twelve stones the men carried?

Why did he do this?

This first encampment of the Israelites in the Holy Land, where the stones were set up for a memorial, was named Gilgal. *Gilgal* means “rolling.” Read Joshua 5:9 to see why this name was given to the place. Like the Israelites we are sometimes very, very slow to make up our minds to be brave enough to shake off our selfish ways and go forward in the Lord’s way. But when we finally do, the way opens before us—because the Lord can be with us when we follow the commandments. Now read Joshua 5:10-12 as the end of our story for today.

Intermediate

The difference between the states of reformation and regeneration should be stressed. This may be done through the correspondence of the change of leadership. The meaning of the Jordan and the central place of the ark in the story, and the need of having the “courage of our convictions” are important points. The teacher should keep in mind, however, that the Intermediates themselves are still “in Egypt” and that for them all this is necessary memory-knowledge—the “corn” (grain) being stored up in Egypt.

Deuteronomy means a “second naming” or repetition. The book of Deuteronomy is a summing up by Moses in his last days on earth of the dealings of the Lord with the Israelites from the time when they first encamped at Sinai to their arrival at the Jordan River, and a reiteration of the commandments and many other laws given them at Sinai. It closes with Moses’ song of thanksgiving to the Lord, his solemn charge to the people to observe the law, his blessing of the twelve tribes, and finally his being called by the Lord up to the top of Mount Nebo, where he was permitted to view the Holy Land spread out far below, and then his death. For even Moses had on one occasion disobeyed the Lord (Numbers 20:7-13) and could not enter the Holy Land.

Joshua had been appointed by the Lord to succeed Moses as leader of the Israelites. We hear of Joshua first in Exodus 17 when, in the first battle Israel fought, he led the army against the Amalekites while Moses went up on top of the mountain and Aaron and Hur helped him keep his hands uplifted to the Lord until Amalek

was defeated. Joshua continued to be the leader of Israel's army. In the story of the sending out of the spies (Numbers 13-14), Joshua and Caleb were the only ones of the twelve spies who, after searching out the land of Canaan, encouraged the people to go forward immediately and conquer it because the Lord would be with them and give them the victory. Because the people refused to trust the Lord and instead followed the advice of the other ten spies, the Lord told Moses that of all the men who at that time were twenty years of age and over—old enough to vote in the matter—only Joshua and Caleb should ever enter the Holy Land. The others would all die in the wilderness. That was why the pillar of cloud and fire kept them wandering from place to place for forty years before it finally brought them to Jordan. The people who follow Joshua into the Holy Land in our story for today—except for Caleb—are the young people and children who have grown up in the wilderness, and their children.

Nevertheless, it was a great host of people, with many little children and all their tents and household goods and their flocks and herds. Verse 15 of chapter 3 tells us that they reached the Jordan at harvest time and that the river at that time was always at flood. You remember that the wilderness journey represents the period of reformation, when we are obeying the truth because we know we ought to but against all our natural inclinations. If we keep trying, however, the time comes when our natural inclinations to rebel—like the people who had been brought up in Egypt—have died out, and we find that we are no longer unwilling to obey or afraid in the face of temptations and difficulties. This is the harvest of all our efforts, when we can begin to gather the good fruit, the real enjoyment of doing right. There is only one more river to cross, and when the Lord shows us how to cross it, we are no longer afraid to try. We have learned to trust our leader. Moses and Joshua both represent the Lord's truth, but whereas Moses represents the law of the Lord obeyed from a sense of duty, Joshua represents this same law obeyed willingly and eagerly. Joshua, Swedenborg says, represents "the truth fighting." The entrance

into the Holy Land represents the beginning of real regeneration, when we have set our outer lives in order and begin to search out and overcome the evils which are within us. These evils are the strong enemies who lived within the Holy Land itself. We use the same law of the Lord to direct us, but we use it now by our own will, because the Lord has been able to give us a new will very different from our old selfish will. This change in our will is regeneration—being “born again.”

The name *Jordan* means “the descender.” In a little more than two hundred miles the Jordan descends from the mountains of Lebanon to the Dead Sea, the lowest spot on the face of the earth. This pictures the truth from the Lord flowing down to people in the very lowest possible spiritual states. The Jordan is also the boundary of the Holy Land on the east, and you remember that the east, where the sun rises, represents the Lord. So the truths pictured by the Jordan are those truths which introduce us into the land of heavenly living, the primary truths of the Word such as that the Lord is our Heavenly Father, that all good and truth are from Him, and that He can help us only as we are willing to obey Him. We all want to enter the Holy Land. What is it that makes these simple truths appear as a barrier just when we are ready to enter—at the time of harvest? It is the enemies in the land, the evils deep within us. When our “Holy Land” is full of evil tendencies, they make these introductory truths seem false.* Even after all our experience with the Lord’s goodness to us, can we really believe that everything that happens to us is a sign of the Lord’s love for us, and that the only right way of life is the way of obedience to the commandments?

At Joshua’s command the priests bearing the ark stepped boldly forward into the river, and immediately the river parted. And so

*Cf. AE 700¹²⁻¹³ where Swedenborg takes note of the *basic* correspondence of Jordan, but notes that *here* “its waters signify falsities of evil.” Thus “they were parted and removed to give a passage to the sons of Israel, who were to represent the church.” After the people had passed over, “the waters returned. Then these same waters signified truths that introduce.”

long as the ark remained in the midst of the channel, the waters were held back and the people passed over safely. So long as we keep the commandments central in our thinking and go forward boldly, the Lord can keep the way open before us.

You remember that stones represent foundation truths. Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan and twelve stones from Jordan at Gilgal, their first encampment in the Holy Land. These were to serve forever as reminders of what they had been enabled to do that day. Think of this and read the Lord's charge to Joshua (Joshua 1:6-9), which is a charge to everyone who wishes to achieve a heavenly character and so live in heaven both here and in the life after death.

Basic Correspondences

the Jordan	=	the truths which introduce us into heavenly life
the Jordan as a barrier to Israel	=	falsities of evil
stones	=	foundation truths

Senior

The important lesson for this age group is the difference between setting our outward conduct in order and actually beginning to search out and overcome our inward foes. The law of the Lord, as summed up in the commandments, is our guide and support in both efforts, but there is a change in our attitude toward it—a new will—when regeneration begins.

With this lesson we come to the end of the period of “reformation” pictured by the wilderness journey. What makes it seem so hard for us to remake our outward lives in the order prescribed by the Lord is the persistence of the worldly standards developed during our life of slavery in Egypt. The Israelites were not allowed to reach their final encampment near the Jordan until all these unwilling followers of Moses had died. Those who encamped by the Jordan had been only children in Egypt and had all done their growing up in the wilderness, except for two men, Joshua and Caleb. Even Moses, although he was allowed to view the Holy Land from the top of Mount Nebo, died on that mountain and

never set foot in the land. Moses represents the law of the Lord followed from the mere principle of obedience.

Joshua, Swedenborg says, represents “the truth fighting.” When outward obedience has finally become so habitual as to be willing obedience, actual regeneration begins. Then—and not until then—we are ready to search out and overcome our inner evils. It takes far more courage to conquer these inward foes than to do right outwardly. Joshua is given two great charges: “Be strong and of a good courage” and “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein.” These are both essential to regeneration.

Everything in the Scriptures may have both a good and a bad correspondence, depending upon whether at the moment it is a friend or a foe of the spiritual progress of man. This is only to say that goodness or badness is never in the outward expression or act, but is in the motive which is behind it. A man may keep all the commandments outwardly from the selfish desire to appear good and to receive honor and profit from his neighbors. The devil can quote Scripture, as we may remember from the story of the Lord’s temptations in the wilderness.

So the Jordan River, which almost always represents the Lord’s truth flowing down from its pure source through all the planes of life to the very lowest, pictures in our lesson today the opposite of this truth.

The Jordan is the boundary of the Holy Land, those simple truths without which no one can enter a heavenly state of life. But when the Holy Land is full of evil people and the Jordan bars the entrance of the Israelites, it represents the false ideas in the mind which must be overcome before one can enter upon the conquest of his deeper evils—ideas, perhaps, of one’s own importance and wisdom. The priests bearing the ark are our religious principles which rally around the Lord’s laws as their guide and protector. These are told to go forward boldly, and before them the apparent barrier draws back. As long as they stand firm, the people—all our

other affections and thoughts—can pass through safely into the Holy Land. There are still many enemies to face, but the line has been crossed and we have gained a sure foothold in heavenly living.

We have said that the crossing of the Red Sea pictures our first decision to “be good,” to follow the Lord instead of the world and our own desires. We have gone a long way since then, fighting our bad habits and bringing our outward conduct into order. Now we cross another barrier of water and begin to enjoy the good life and to face confidently the foes which will keep cropping up within our hearts and minds as long as we live in this world.

Joshua’s first act in this new land was to set up twelve stones from the river as a memorial to be pointed out to future generations. These twelve stones are the fundamental truths of the Word which we are to set up in our minds in the very beginning of the regenerate life so that we may never forget the mercy and saving power of the Lord; so that, no matter how successful we may be in our efforts, we may never attribute our success to our own wisdom and goodness or imagine we have got beyond the necessity of keeping the commandments.

Adult

Good discussion topics are: the meaning of the change from Moses to Joshua; the correspondence—good and bad—of the Jordan; and the central place that the commandments must take in our lives in the regenerate state as well as in the period of reformation.

We note that we have left the books of Moses. Most of our lessons have been from Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers. This does not mean that Leviticus and Deuteronomy are of less value than the other three, but merely that the instruction contained in them is for the most part too detailed for the purpose of a rapid survey of the whole Word. Each one of the statutes in the book of Leviticus has an inner meaning which applies to our life and conduct. The book of Deuteronomy, called the second giving of the law, was all delivered after the Israelites had reached their final encampment

near the Jordan, and is in itself a summary of all that had happened to them under Moses and of all the instruction given them through him. Much of it is in the first person, as spoken by Moses directly to the people. In the first four chapters he rehearses briefly the story of their wanderings, bringing to their remembrance the wonderful way in which the Lord has upheld them together with a picture of their own weakness and disobedience. Chapters 5 to 26 are a recapitulation of the laws and statutes previously given to them, with a constant exhortation to obedience. In the rest of the book these laws are delivered into the stewardship of the Levites, and Joshua and the people are solemnly urged to observe them faithfully in the years to come, particularly in times of safety and prosperity, when they will be tempted to forget their dependence upon the Lord.

The leadership of Moses represents the first stage of our journey out of Egypt, away from the dominion of purely natural and worldly feelings and thoughts. As we have seen, these worldly motives and ideas cling to us and are constantly cropping up. The Israelites in the wilderness were always looking back longingly toward the fleshpots of Egypt. Throughout the period of reformation we have a tendency to look upon the law of the Lord as a hard master, and to take considerable credit to ourselves when we obey it. The higher part of our mind recognizes that happiness and peace can come only through conquering self and wholly following the Lord, but the old self persists in intruding itself in everything we do. The type of obedience represented by Moses can bring us in sight of the Holy Land of truly spiritual living, but cannot take us across the border line into it.

Joshua, whose name means “whose help is the Lord,” represents another type of leadership—the truth fighting. When we have obeyed the Lord’s law until it has become so interwoven with our lives that we no longer struggle against it, but see it in a new spirit as an expression of the Lord’s love and look to its leadership as a matter of course, the truth becomes ours to use and we are ready to pass over from merely external living to genuine spiritual living,

to apply the test of the Lord's truth to our inner motives and thoughts and to fight from it against deeper enemies than mere evils of conduct.

The conquest of the Holy Land is the period of regeneration, and the Lord wants us to go as far in regeneration as we possibly can. He will be with us in this deeper conflict as he was in the more external battles. He says to Joshua, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." But we must remember the charge. All our efforts must be founded upon the Word, and we must "meditate therein day and night." We never reach the state where we can discard the law or break the law with impunity, nor do we ever get so far that we cannot learn more about the Word and its meaning for us. Also, we must be "strong and of a good courage." The Christian life is an active, constructive, progressive life, in which we must always advance, never resting satisfied with what we have attained. It requires the highest form of courage, the courage to speak truth, to say "no" to temptation, to face our own evils squarely, often to go against popular opinion, to face ridicule, to love our enemies. And there is only one source of such courage: we must not look to ourselves as strong, but we must be strong and of a good courage "for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." We must recognize that we have no strength except from the Lord, that our victories are the Lord's victories in us. This is a lesson which the Lord teaches over and over again throughout the Word: "Without me ye can do nothing."

The Israelites reached the Jordan at the time of harvest. The beginning of regeneration is the time of harvest for all the victories we have won in our wilderness journey. But the Israelites found one more barrier which must be overcome. The Jordan River stands for the Lord's truth coming down to the level of everyday life, the boundary of heavenly living. If we want to have eternal life, we must first of all keep the commandments. At the time when Israel camped before Jordan, the Holy Land was full of evil people who were ready to fight them. We all have selfishness deeply en-

trenched within us, and self-interest can turn even truth from the Lord into falsity. So Swedenborg tells us that the Jordan barring the way of entrance into the Holy Land represents falsity instead of truth (or, more precisely, truth falsified). Once it is passed it again becomes truth.

It was by the power of the ark that Israel passed safely through these waters. The commandments laid up in the ark in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle represent the commandments “written on the heart.” This is what enables us to enter the Holy Land of a regenerate life. When we examine ourselves to make sure that we have been doing right outwardly not just to avoid trouble or to seem “respectable” or even just to get to heaven, and when we determine to live from truly worthy motives, obeying the commandments from love to the Lord and the neighbor, keeping them written in our hearts and minds as well as in our outward conduct, then we really enter the Holy Land.

And even then we need reminders. We know that we all have a tendency to slip back, especially when things are going well with us, as Moses had warned the people before he died. We need something to bring frequently to our attention the remembrance of our past difficulties, of the Lord’s saving power, and of our good resolutions. The twelve stones taken from the bed of Jordan and set up at Gilgal for a memorial picture this reminder. We need them for ourselves and we need them to help us in teaching our children the way of life and in teaching others. If the commandments are set up in our lives so that others see that they are of the utmost importance to us, we shall not belie our teaching by our practice. Read Joshua 4:20-24.

Other important events are connected with Gilgal. There the Israelites celebrated their first Passover in the Holy Land. This, as we know, was also ordained as a solemn reminder of the Lord’s mercy and saving power. And at Gilgal the manna ceased and they began to eat the fruits of the land. When we reach the regenerate state, we know where our spiritual food comes from and how it is produced. We no longer have to say of spiritual nourishment,

“What is it?” It no longer melts in the heat of the day or spoils when we store it up. It was here, too, that the ritual of circumcision was restored as the sign of dedication to purity of life. The “reproach of Egypt” has been “rolled away” as we are told in Joshua 5:9 in explanation of the naming of Gilgal, which means either *rolling* or *a circle* [of stones].

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 700: “Here ‘Jordan’ and its waters signify falsities of evil . . . since the land of Canaan was then filled with idolatrous nations . . . Now as the Lord alone removes and scatters the falsities of evil that are from hell, and by His Divine truths brings the faithful into the church and into heaven, and as the ark and the law inclosed in it represented the Lord in relation to Divine truth, it was commanded that the ark should go before the people and thus lead them. This is why it came to pass that as soon as the priests bearing the ark dipped their feet in the waters of Jordan those waters were divided and went down, and the people passed over on dry land, and after this was done the waters returned. Then these same waters signify truths that bring in; for Jordan was the first boundary of the land of Canaan, and that land, when the sons of Israel had entered into it, represented the church, and that river introduction into it. As the waters of Jordan signified truths that bring in they were commanded to take up out of the midst of it twelve stones, and carry them over to the first place where they passed the night, and this because ‘stones’ signify truths, and ‘twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of Israel’ signified the truths of the church.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. Where did Moses die? *Mount Nebo*
- P. Who succeeded him as leader? *Joshua*
- J. What charge was given to Joshua? *Be strong and of a good courage*
- J. Where was the last encampment of the Israelites in the wilderness?
opposite Jericho
- J. At what time of year did they reach it? *harvest*
- P. What barred their way into the Holy Land? *Jordan*
- P. How was the river parted for them? *by a miracle*
- J. What did Joshua set up in the middle of the river bed? *twelve stones*
- J. What did he set up at their first camp in the Holy Land? *twelve stones*

- I. Why did he set up these stones? *reminder of miracle*
- J. What was this first camping place called? *Gilgal [rolling]*
- J. Why? *reproach of Egypt “rolled away”*
- J. What else happened there? *Passover, circumcision*
- I. What does Joshua represent in us? *the truth fighting*
- I. What does the Jordan represent? *introductory truths to spiritual living*
- S. What is pictured by crossing the Jordan into the Holy Land? *beginning to change will and hence to live truly spiritual lives*