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June 5th: Joshua 3 & Luke 19:29-48

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Alastair Roberts

Crossing the Jordan. The Triumphal Entry.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Joshua 3. Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and they set out from Shittim. And they came to the Jordan, he and all the people of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. At the end of three days the officers went through the camp and commanded the people, As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it.

Yet there shall be a distance between you and it, about two thousand cubits in length. Do not come near it, in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before. Then Joshua said to the people, Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.

And Joshua said to the priests, Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on before the people. So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people. The Lord said to Joshua, Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may

know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.

And as for you, command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant. When you come to the brink of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan. And Joshua said to the people of Israel, Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God.

And Joshua said, Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Gergesites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man.

And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing. And the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap. So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water, now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of the harvest, the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is besides Aratham.

And those flowing down toward the sea of the Araba, the salt sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan.

The beginning of the story of the book of Joshua serves as the counterpart to the earlier story of the Exodus, and the events involved should be closely related to each other. The Red Sea crossing and the crossing of the river Jordan in our chapter Joshua chapter 3 are very similar events. In many respects they should be understood as two stages of a single movement.

Unsurprisingly we find them spoken of in extremely close relationship elsewhere in scripture. Isaiah chapter 63 verses 11-14 speaks of the Red Sea crossing as if of an event that comprehends the entire wilderness experience. Leading Israel through the deep is directly related to leading them through the wilderness.

Psalm 114 also holds the two events together in a sort of parallelism. The two crossings bracket the entire transitional period of the wilderness wanderings. The sea looked and fled, Jordan turned back.

Psalm 114 verse 3. Psalm 74 verses 13-15 is a further example of such a close relationship. You divided the sea by your might, you broke the heads of the sea

monsters on the waters, you crushed the heads of Leviathan, you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness, you split open springs and brooks, you dried up ever flowing streams. James Nornberg writes, the wilderness period itself is an expanded threshold between two spaces, a threshold that has widened to become itself a space, with two thresholds of its own.

These are the thresholds marked by one generation going out, out to the wilderness, and another generation going in, out of the wilderness into the promised land. The momentum across such a threshold space might constitute a single momentum, as the parallelism of Psalm 106 verse 9 allows. He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it was dried up, so he led them through the depths as through the wilderness.

This condenses the buffer space into an abridgment of chaos. Instead, the narrative offers various objections to such an advance, whether these are generated by considerations of military strategy, or by hesitations upon the threshold, which are punished by wandering or abiding there. In some way, Israel was qualified for the promised land by the wilderness, either penally, or through probation and trial, or by preliminary service to God.

The close relationship between the departure from Egypt and the entry into the land at the beginning of the Book of Joshua can further be seen in the way that all of the major themes of the earlier Exodus period are repeated or resolved here. The Jordan crossing completes the movement begun by the Red Sea crossing. The manner provided after the Red Sea crossing in Exodus chapter 16 will cease when they first eat of the fruits of the land in Joshua chapter 5. In Joshua chapter 5, the Israelites are circumcised and celebrate the Passover, as in Exodus chapter 12.

Finally, in chapter 5 verses 13 to 15, Joshua meets the commander of the army of the Lord, and has to remove the sandals from his feet. This corresponds to Moses' first encounter with the angel of the Lord in Exodus chapter 3 verses 2 to 5, or in the later coming of the angel to judge Egypt. Just as the angel of the Lord had plagued Egypt with Moses and Aaron in the Exodus before the crossing of the Red Sea, so Israel, now formed into the host of the Lord and the bearers of his battle chariot, would plague the Canaanites after the crossing of the Jordan.

Peter Lightheart writes, In chapter 3, the Jordan parts and Israel crosses on dry ground. Then the Israelite men are circumcised and they celebrate the Passover, which is immediately followed by the destruction of the city and the deliverance of Rahab's house. The Exodus followed this pattern, destruction of Egypt, Passover, water crossing.

Now the entry into the land chiasmatically reverses the sequence, water crossing, Passover, destruction of Jericho. The two spies who enter a house in a doomed city also remind us of the two angels visiting Sodom and delivering Lot's house. Jericho is both Sodom and Egypt, as we see in Revelation 11.8. Closer to home they parallel Moses and Aaron

before Pharaoh.

So in this way the two accounts are bound together as an integral whole. They're inseparable stages of a single unified movement and they're bookended accounts that bracket the entire wilderness experience. Israel is going to be led over the Jordan by the Ark of the Covenant, born by the Levitical priests.

They represent the Lord going before the people. Whereas the Lord was present in the pillar of cloud and fire in the Red Sea crossing, now the Lord is present in the Ark of the Covenant. The officers instruct the people to do this after three days and we can see previous mentions of three days in chapter 1 verse 11, chapter 2 verse 16 and verse 22.

The people must consecrate themselves before the Lord leads them across the Jordan, much as Israel consecrated itself before the Theophany at Sinai. Presumably this involved washing and refraining from sexual relations. They must keep a distance of 2,000 cubits, about half a mile or so, from the Ark.

And the Lord addresses Joshua, telling him that he will be exalted as leader, as Moses was. The Red Sea crossing was an event that solidified Moses' status as the leader of the people. In Exodus chapter 14 verse 31, Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

The Jordan crossing plays a similar role for Joshua. Joshua tells the people that the cutting off of the waters of the Jordan will demonstrate that the Lord will drive out the peoples of the land before them. This will manifest the Lord's presence with them.

He underlines the fact that the Lord is the Lord of the whole earth. He isn't merely some regional or tribal deity. He's the creator and the ruler of all.

The Israelites are instructed to take 12 men from the tribes of Israel, although we don't learn until the next chapter what these men are for. Israel had earlier been instructed to get 12 men, one from each tribe, for spying out the land. This is a representative action of the whole nation that they're being prepared for.

The crossing of the river at this time of year would have been very difficult. It might have been up to half a mile across in flood, although it is much, much smaller nowadays. Crossing rivers would have been very difficult in the ancient world.

While there would have been bridges in certain locations in these times, there are no bridges mentioned in scripture to my recollection. Water crossings were difficult and important transitional events. How was the river cut off? Perhaps by a landslide.

Landslides that cut off the river Jordan for a few days are recorded in a number of years. In 1160, in 1267, in 1534, in 1546, in 1834, in 1906 and in 1927. We must remember

that many of the miracles we see in the Exodus are probably not supernatural so much as hypernatural.

They don't suspend the natural functioning of nature, but rather demonstrate that the Lord is the one who is powerful even over and through and in that natural functioning. God does not need to act against or over nature to achieve his purpose. He can act through it.

It is his instrument and he can move it wherever he pleases. Israel's spiritual identity was shaped by water crossings. Abraham's call led him over the Euphrates.

Israel's ancestors served foreign gods on the far side of the Euphrates before they were called. The river Jabbok is where Israel receives its name. The Red Sea is where Israel is born as a nation.

The Jordan River is where Israel enters into the land. These are physical landmarks that recall spiritual milestones. A question to consider.

Can you think of occasions in scripture where the crossing of the Jordan and its symbolic significance serves as the background for a narrative? Luke chapter 19 verses 29 to 48. When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples saying, Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a cult tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here.

If anyone asks you why are you untying it, you shall say this, The Lord has need of it. So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. And as they were untying the cult, its owner said to them, Why are you untying the cult? And they said, The Lord has need of it.

And they brought it to Jesus and throwing their cloaks on the cult, they set Jesus on it. And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. And as he was drawing near, already on the way down the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, Teacher rebuke your disciples. He answered, I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up a barricade around you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.

And he entered the temple, and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, It is written, My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers. And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests, and the scribes, and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.

At the end of Luke chapter 19 we begin the third phase of Luke's Gospel. The first phase runs from the start of the Gospel to the turn towards Jerusalem. The second phase is the long drawn out journey to Jerusalem.

And now with the triumphal entry we enter Jerusalem and the final week. Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem echoes passages such as 1 Kings chapter 1 verses 33-44 where Solomon's riding on the king's mule is a demonstration that he is the true heir and successor to David. This also fulfils the prophecy of Zechariah chapter 9 verses 9-10.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you, righteous and having salvation as he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations. His rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.

Donkeys and mules were associated with judges and royalty in scripture. The kingdom began with a quest to find donkeys in 1 Samuel chapter 9. It seems to me that that story is being recalled here in various ways. The judges and Saul were associated with donkeys.

Judges chapter 5 verse 10, chapter 10 verse 4, chapter 12 verse 14 and 1 Samuel chapter 9 verse 3. The instructions given to the disciples are also similar to the sorts of signs given to Saul at the dawn of the kingdom in 1 Samuel chapter 10. And indeed this is the first of three signs, I believe, that present the coming of the kingdom with Christ as parallel with the first dawn of the kingdom in the book of 1 Samuel. No one has ever sat on the animal before.

It is dedicated for a special purpose. And the casting of garments is reminiscent of the welcome of Jehu to Jerusalem in 2 Kings chapter 9 verses 11 to 13, where he came to destroy the worship of Baal. When Jehu came out to the servants of his master, they said to him, Is all well? Why did this mad fellow come to you? And he said to them, You know the fellow and his talk.

And they said, That is not true. Tell us now. And he said, Thus and so he spoke to me, saying, Thus says the Lord, I anoint you king over Israel.

Then in haste every man of them took his garment and put it under him on the bare steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed, Jehu is king. This might also remind us

of David's removal of his outer garments in the triumphal entry of the ark into Jerusalem. The Pharisees then would be like Michael who sought to rebuke David in 2 Samuel chapter 6 and was judged for it.

It is important to notice that Jesus moves from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem and back again several times in the chapters that follow. In chapter 19 verse 37, chapter 21 verse 37, chapter 22 verse 39, chapter 23 verse 33 and chapter 24 verse 50. This geographical to and fro is significant.

The reference to the stones crying out might also recall John the Baptist's claim of chapter 3 verse 8 of God creating children for Abraham from the stones. It should also be related probably to the claim in the immediately following verses that the stones of Jerusalem would be levelled. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem.

Jerusalem does not know the day of its visitation. It was not aware. It was not prepared.

And his weeping over Jerusalem might recall the weeping of the prophet Jeremiah in the book of Lamentations. Jehu's triumphal entry into Jerusalem was followed by the destruction of the temple of Baal and its priests. Unsurprisingly, then, Jesus goes to the temple and drives people out.

His statement about the temple being a den of thieves needs to be read against the background of Jeremiah chapter 7 to which he alludes. Jeremiah chapter 7 verse 11 is the verse he quotes. For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered, only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord. The Jews of Jeremiah's day treated the temple as a sort of talisman.

It protected them from God's judgment. Because God was present there, they could get away with what they wanted. They thought that it enabled them to continue in oppression and lawlessness.

They could, like brigands fleeing to a den, flee to the temple and find refuge there, their worship providing them with cover for all their iniquity. Jesus is making the same point of his generation. They have treated the temple and its worship as a way to excuse themselves from the actual service of the Lord, as a way to cover up their crimes, and

not to deal with the truth of what they have done.

I don't believe that the point of driving out those buying and selling in the temple was primarily to do with an objection to the money changers, and the dove sellers in particular, or with any principled objection to the performance of such activities within the broader temple precincts. The chief point was to put a temporary halt to the sacrifices, which couldn't proceed without these activities. Now there is an allusion, I think, to Zechariah chapter 14 verse 21, Jesus then, having driven out all these people, makes the temple a site of his teaching.

It's worth noting the language of exorcism that is used to describe the removal of those who are buying and selling in the temple in verse 45.