

# Will Man Reach the “Promised Land”?

***“By faith Abraham  
... made his home  
in the promised  
land like a  
stranger, living in  
tents, as did Isaac  
and Jacob, who  
also inherited the  
same promise,  
because he was  
waiting for the city  
with permanent  
foundations, whose  
architect and  
builder is God.”  
—Hebrews 11:8-10,  
International  
Standard Version***

**FIFTY YEARS AGO, IN** April, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave a speech in Memphis, Tennessee, towards the end of which he spoke these words: “I just want to do God’s will. And He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. ... Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”

This speech was to be Dr. King’s last. The next day, as he stood outside his motel room in Memphis,

he was killed by an assassin's bullet. It was later noted by the doctor who performed his autopsy that although he was only 39 years of age, his heart was in the condition of a 60-year-old man. Many attributed this to the extensive stress of his many years of involvement in the Civil Rights movement. Surely, it stands as evidence of his tireless commitment to the cause of equality, peace, and brotherhood among all people.

The spirit of Martin Luther King's desire, both for himself and for the many people he represented, to enter the Promised Land, has undoubtedly echoed in the minds and hearts of much of mankind. Humanity, in general, has long sought for a time and place in which exists an idyllic utopia of peace, security, health, respect and love among earth's inhabitants. Sincere men and women throughout the world continue to hope, and even pray, for an affirmative answer to the question of our title—the desire so vividly expressed by Dr. King half a century ago.

## **BIBLICAL ORIGIN**

The term "Promised Land" has its origins in the Bible, specifically denoting the land that was promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as declared in our opening Scripture. These verses further state that the faithful patriarchs only lived as strangers in this land. They patiently waited for the time when God would prepare it as a permanent dwelling place for their descendants, including the establishment of cities with "permanent foundations."

With the passage of time, the offspring of Jacob's twelve sons became numerous, and God began to call them by the name "Israel." (Gen. 35:9-12)

Because it was still not yet God's due time for the Israelites to possess the land promised to their forefathers, he overruled that they lived in Egypt for a lengthy period. In Egypt, they "increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty." (Exod. 1:1-7) Finally, the time came when God's purpose of having the Israelites live permanently in the land promised to their father Abraham was to begin its fulfillment. "God remembered his covenant with Abraham."—Exod. 2:24

Under the leadership of Moses and Aaron, having been appointed by God for this great purpose, the Israelites left Egypt. It would be another forty years before the monumental event took place of entering the promised land, and approximately six more years to conquer and divide it among the various tribes. (Josh. 14:7,10) Although we will not consider them at this time, the Scriptures record many significant events which took place during this period. There were the ten plagues in Egypt; the institution of Israel's Passover; the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea; the spying out of the land of promise, and the resulting evil reports; the wandering of the Israelites in the wilderness for forty years; the provisions of food and water made by God for the people; and the establishment of Israel's covenant with God, with its laws and religious services. The Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy contain much detail about these and many other experiences of the Israelites as they journeyed.

## **GREAT ANTICIPATION**

The narrative concerning the children of Israel entering the land of promise is recorded in the Book

of Joshua. As we view this momentous episode in their history, we can sense an air of excitement in the camp of Israel. The fulfillment of the promise made to their father, Abraham, nearly five centuries earlier, was about to be realized. God had said he would give the land, called Canaan, to Abraham's posterity forever. (Gen. 12:1-7; 13:15) Before Moses' death, as he stood at the top of Mount Pisgah looking over into Canaan, God outlined the extent of the land that was to belong to Israel. (Deut. 34:1-4) Moses was not allowed to enter Canaan, but now, under the leadership of Joshua, the Israelites were camped at the border of that very land.

Forty years earlier, the Israelites had stood in the same position, on the verge of entering the land. At that time, only a few months after they had left Egypt with a "high hand" ["boldly," *New American Standard Bible*] and with triumphant songs of praise to God upon their lips, they reached the border of Canaan. (Exod. 14:8; 15:1-21; 19:1; Deut. 1:2,19,21) Yet, when Moses had sent the twelve spies for reconnaissance into the land, only two came back with positive reports. Joshua and Caleb said, "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it." "Surely it floweth with milk and honey." The other ten spies, however, "brought up an evil report of the land." "It is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; ... and there we saw the giants." "And the people wept that night." (Num. 13:25-33; 14:1) Their anticipation turned to fear, so great it drove the people to consider stoning Caleb and Joshua. (Num. 14:10) Their faith in God was not strong enough to follow his leadings.

Now, though, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, this unbelieving generation of Israelites had died, as God had promised. (Num. 14:22,23) Even their staunch leader, Moses, was now dead. Only the two faithful spies, Joshua and Caleb, remained of the adult generation that came out of Egypt. (Num. 32:11-13) They were still convinced that Jehovah was a mighty God who could give them the promised land of Canaan, which flowed with milk and honey.

After the death of Moses, Joshua was the logical choice of God to lead the children of Israel into Canaan. He had been Moses' faithful right-hand man, having already demonstrated great leadership abilities. It was he who had led Israel in their fierce battle against the Amalekites, and, with the Lord's help, had gained a great victory. (Exod. 17:8-14) Now the people turned to Joshua, confidently placing their trust in him, knowing that he had been specially appointed by God.

Joshua, like Moses, was a meek man who did not grasp responsibility and authority as he could have done. However, when God charged him with the function which had been Moses', he immediately accepted the privilege and took action. The Lord said, "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. ... Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."—Josh. 1:5,9

## **JOSHUA BEGINS HIS LEADERSHIP**

Joshua instructed his officers, "Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over

this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it.” (Josh. 1:11) The people replied, “All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go.” (vs. 16) Times had changed, and the people with them. This generation was far more confident than their fathers had been. They longed for an end to their desert wanderings, and to enter the land.

Two of his trusted men were chosen by Joshua to secretly survey the city of Jericho. The spies were directed to seek out a woman named Rahab, who quickly took them into her home and hid them. From Rahab’s words we know that the townspeople were frightened, and the city leaders were watching for Hebrew spies. (Josh. 2:1-7) Her expression of faith is shown in these words: “For the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.” (vs. 11) Although Rahab did not have a good reputation, she was commended by the Apostle Paul for her conviction. “By faith ... she had received the spies with peace.” (Heb. 11:31) Her assurance was so strong that she was willing to place herself in jeopardy by hiding them, and then helping them to escape by a rope through the window of her home, which was built into the wall of the city.

After following Rahab’s advice to hide in the nearby mountains for three days to avoid their pursuers, the spies crossed over Jordan and returned to Joshua. Their report was most positive. “Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us.” (Josh. 2:16,22-24) With this affirmative information, Joshua set in motion the plans to cross the Jordan River. After giving all the needed

instructions, he spoke to the people, saying, “Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the Lord will do wonders among you.”—Josh. 3:5

## **CROSSING THE JORDAN**

From a military standpoint, it was a very unfavorable time of the year to cross the Jordan River, since it was at spring flood stage and was overflowing its banks. Normally it was less than one hundred feet across at this point, but now its span had increased to many times that width. The current also had become dangerously swift and deep. This did not deter the eagerness of the Israelites. As they made camp that night on the banks of the river and went over the plan for the coming day, not one word of protest was made. Their faith in God’s power and wisdom was strong.

Through Joshua, the Lord instructed the people that on the following day they were to watch the Levitical priests who would precede them, carrying the Ark of the Covenant from the Tabernacle. From a position approximately one-half to three-quarters of a mile behind, the whole company of Israel was to follow. God would then perform a miracle. As soon as the soles of the priests’ feet rested in the water, the river would stop flowing, and the waters would “stand upon an heap.” (Josh. 3:3-13) The priests, carrying the Ark, were to stop and stand in the center of the river, until all Israel had passed safely over.

Thus it came to pass, just as God had described to Joshua, that “all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.” This included “about forty thousand

prepared for war [who] passed over before the Lord unto battle.” (Josh. 3:17; 4:13) Whatever method he used to stop the flow of the dangerous Jordan River, we know that it was the mighty hand of God that was exercised on behalf of his chosen people.

## **MEMORIAL STONES**

The Lord instructed Joshua to select one man from each of the twelve tribes and command them to each carry out a stone from the middle of Jordan, where the priests stood holding the Ark, and to leave the twelve stones “in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night,” which was Gilgal. “These stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever. ... And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, ... that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever.” (Josh. 4:2-7,20-24) Before the priests left their position in the river, Joshua placed another “twelve stones in the midst of Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests ... stood: and they are there unto this day.”—vs. 9

“When the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests’ feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before.” (vs. 18) The kings of the Amorites and Canaanites learned that God had “dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of



Israel.” Because the flooded river was no longer a measure of safety to them, “their hearts melted, neither was there spirit in them any more.”—Josh. 5:1

At Gilgal, where the memorial stones had been placed according to God’s instructions, Israel for the first time pitched camp in the promised land. Four days after crossing the Jordan, they “kept the passover ... in the plains of Jericho. And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day. And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan.”—Josh. 5:10-12

## **PICTURES OF THINGS TO COME**

There are many valuable pictures and lessons to be found in this thrilling account of entering the land of Canaan. We learn that faith is rewarded, when we observe the case of Rahab. We see how God championed Israel when they trusted in him, and gave them strength to overcome the great obstacles which they encountered in entering and conquering the land.

Paul draws striking lessons from the fact that the unfaithful Israelites who originally left Egypt were not permitted to enter the land. He states it in this context: “I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest. ... For who was it who heard the Word of God and yet provoked his indignation? Was it not all who were rescued from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses? And who was it with whom God was displeased for forty long years? Was it not

those who ... fell into sin, and left their bones in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they should never enter his rest? Was it not these very men who refused to trust him? Yes, it is all too plain that it was refusal to trust God that prevented these men from entering his rest.” (Heb. 3:11,16-19, *J. B. Phillips New Testament*) These words admonish us to place our reliance upon our strong and faithful God who will never desert those who put their trust in him.

The Scriptures also portray this experience of Israel in another pictorial way. We are told that God rested on the seventh creative day from that phase of his work. It was a day which was to see the final steps toward the completion of his purposes for the earth, and for mankind. (Gen. 2:1-3) Man in his original perfection was commissioned to assist in this work. “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion ... over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” (Gen. 1:28) After Adam’s fall, however, man lost his dominion. He was not able to subdue the earth, and was incapable of filling it with a race that possessed life. The terrible “wilderness” experience of man began when he displayed his lack of faith in God, and instead believed Satan’s lie.

Joshua is the Hebrew equivalent of the name “Jesus,” and means “Jehovah is salvation.” With this in mind, the nation of Israel well represents the world of mankind, lost and wandering in the desert of sin, sickness and death. “We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together.” (Rom. 8:22) It is impossible for the people, waiting in pain and longing for six thousand years, to cross

the Jordan River without God's mighty hand to help. The name, Jordan, means "to go downwards," and is an apt picture of divine condemnation, the sentence of death pronounced upon Adam and passed through inheritance to his posterity. However, God's plan of salvation, centered in his Son Jesus, has provided the means by which mankind will, in due time, cross this symbolic river, and enter the promised land of rest.—Rom. 5:17-19; I Cor. 15:21,22

### **THE ARK OF THE COVENANT**

The Ark of the Covenant, which stood in the midst of the river as the Israelites crossed over, was a symbol of God's favor toward them. In its fuller significance, it aptly represents God's future favor over the entire world through Christ. The waters of the Jordan, picturing the sentence of death, dried up when the Ark, carried by the priests, entered the river. The Ark represents both the death and the resurrection of Jesus, by which come a cancellation of the sentence of death in order that the promised land of blessings and rest can be reached by mankind. God's word states that "all nations" will be blessed through Abraham's "seed, which is Christ."—Gal. 3:8,16

It is also significant that the Ark was carried by the priests, and that these first passed into the Jordan before any of the people could cross over. Standing in the midst of the river illustrated the essential part played by the great high priest and his associate priests in freeing the people from condemnation. Jesus died for the world's sins, stopping symbolically in the midst of Jordan, that the world might have the opportunity of passing over. (John

1:29) The underpriests, Christ's footstep followers, also stop there. They lay down their lives sacrificially, that in the next age they might share in the work of helping to lift up the world to pass out from under this terrible curse of death.

It was not necessary that the priests remain in the river Jordan in order to complete the picture. Twelve stones were taken and placed exactly where the priests had stood. These stones well illustrate the "little flock" of faithful ones who have been called out of every "people, and nation," and prepared for use as "kings and priests." They, with Christ their Head, will reign over the earth as God's "royal priesthood" in his coming kingdom. (Luke 12:32; Rev. 5:9,10; I Pet. 2:9) These followers of the Master become "dead with Christ" according to the flesh. (Rom. 6:8) They do not cross over the Jordan, but remain in the midst, like the stones that "are there unto this day." (Josh. 4:9) They give up their inheritance in earthly Canaan to seek the high calling to the divine nature, so that they may be part of the priestly class in the coming age of blessing for mankind.

## **DESTRUCTION OF JERICO**

Upon Israel's crossing the Jordan, a formidable obstacle still lay before them. It was the fortified city of Jericho. With its high walls, it loomed as a mighty fortress that blocked their way to possession of the land. Joshua contemplated the situation, perhaps looking to find some weakness which he could use to his advantage as a means of acquiring access into the city and doing battle against it. The narrative states that as Joshua beheld Jericho, "he

lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place wherein thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so."—Josh. 5:13-15

This mighty angel then told Joshua that God was going to give them the victory over Jericho by an unusual means, not by any ordinary military strategy. It was to be a method that would test the faith of everyone in the camp of Israel. Instead of using their armies to breach and destroy the wall, the angel said that they would again use the Ark of the Covenant. Israel's army was to march around the city once each day for six days, with seven priests carrying the Ark and blowing trumpets. The army was to pass in front of the priests, after which the Ark would proceed from behind, with the priests continuing to blow on their trumpets. This was the only sound to be heard until the seventh day, when Joshua would signal for the people to shout.—Josh. 6:1-10

How improbable the effectiveness of this must have seemed. From a human point of view, it was very doubtful that this approach would be successful. Yet, who could disbelieve the mighty power that had turned back the treacherous power of the Jordan? The Israelites were ready to listen to God and follow his instructions. At dawn on the seventh

day, they were instructed to circle around the city as before, but on this day they were to pass around it seven times. "At the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city." When they did this, "the wall fell down flat."—Josh. 6:15-20

## **FINAL VICTORY OVER SIN AND SATAN**

The destruction of the city of Jericho is a remarkable illustration of the final victory over sin and Satan. The entire world of mankind, by reason of their being raised from the sleep of death, will have been delivered from the legal sentence of death. They will have crossed the Jordan. They will even have their feet planted in the land of promise. They will no longer be wandering aimlessly in the wilderness of sin and death, under the rule of Satan.

However, standing before mankind will be their Jericho, rising up like a mighty barrier to their eternal habitation and enjoyment of the land. It is the great stronghold of sin which must be overcome. The many vestiges of imperfection in man's character acquired during the present reign of sin and death, will need to be warred against and vanquished. As the mighty power of God was available to the Israelites as they, in faith, battled against the foe, so, through faith, all the assistance needed will be at hand for each individual in the kingdom. It will be in God's strength that they also gain the victory.—Rev. 21:3-7

The Apostle Paul says, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down." (Heb. 11:30) The world of mankind will be ready to follow the instructions of the

deliverer, their Joshua, Christ and his church. The people will surround their Jericho and destroy it with a glad shout, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." (Rev. 5:13) How wholeheartedly and enthusiastically the Israelites under Joshua entered into God's plan, despite the fact that it seemed a strange, even foolish, method to conquer a city. So eagerly, too, when the "mountain of the LORD's house" is established, "all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, ... and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths."—Isa. 2:2-5

The people will recognize and follow the presence of God as represented in the Ark of the Covenant, in the Christ, which will govern them in righteousness. The trumpet of truth will be heralded forth by the priesthood of that age, and mankind in their desire to fully enter into the land will shout for joy. No trace of sin will remain when the kingdom work is ended, for the willing and obedient of the people will have destroyed every remnant of it in their characters. (Rev. 21:24-27) The high fortress wall of sin and evil will crumble away under this onslaught. It had been kept secure by Satan for over six thousand years, yet in a comparatively short time—just one thousand years—God will cause it to be utterly destroyed, never to rise again. The combined cooperation of God, Christ and his church, and mankind will make that kingdom of righteousness an eternal success.

Let us, by growing in faith and trust, keeping our hope bright, and continuing steadfastly in our striving

to learn righteousness and subdue sin in our circumcised hearts, be prepared to march around Jericho as the future priestly trumpeters. We will carry the Ark of the Covenant, and the walls of Jericho will tumble down. All mankind will then render honor, praise, and glory to God. The answer of our title will be a resounding, “Yes!” Man will, indeed, not only reach, but will also live eternally, in the Promised Land of a perfect earth. Thus, the desires and hopes so well expressed by Martin Luther King, Jr., fifty years ago, and echoing in the hearts of millions before and since, will be fulfilled, to the honor and glory of God, our Heavenly Father.—I Tim. 1:17 ■