

Prayer

Within each day, Lord Jesus, there is so much. Words are not enough to capture the variety of things we see; fascinating or mundane, beautiful or unsightly, excellent or stupid, and so much more. Give us true discernment, we pray, with which to judge the things we see; and keep us close to You in this fascinating but tempting world. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Wildlife

Too often, we take our surrounding for granted, but the wildlife around us are important to God's creation. Pray that God's people will demonstrate care for all He has created.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who are distressed because of family breakup*
- *Give thanks for the internet and pray that God will use it for good*
- *Pray for scientists and engineers whose work affects us all*

Meditation

Lord Jesus; come into my life today, and surprise me!

Come like a revolution
that breaks all the moulds which set my soul ...

Come like a friend
who brings colour and warmth to my party ...

Come like a rhythm
that sets life's moods and motivates my spirit ...

Come like an honoured guest
whose presence radiates the brightest light ...

Come like a mystery gift
that opens into laughter, joy and radiant love ...

Come like child in the midst
who accepts each soul for who they are, and me ...

Come, Lord Jesus, and truly make my day!

Bible Study - Joshua 1:10-18

¹⁰ Joshua commanded the officers of the people, ¹¹ 'Go through the camp and instruct the people: "Prepare your supplies; for in three days you are to cross over the Jordan, march in, and take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess.'" ¹² Joshua then said to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, ¹³ 'Remember what Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you when he said, "The LORD your God will give you this land in which to settle." ¹⁴ Your wives, your children, and your livestock will stay in the land Moses gave you here on this side of the Jordan; but all your fighting men must cross over fully armed ahead of your brothers, and you will help them ¹⁵ until the LORD settles your kindred as well as to you, and they too

take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving them. After this you may return to your own land and occupy it, the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan to the east.’¹⁶ They said to Joshua: ‘We will do all you have commanded us, and we will go wherever you send us;¹⁷ and we will obey you just as we obeyed Moses in everything, only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses!’¹⁸ If anyone rebels against your orders and does not obey your orders, whatever you command, will be put to death. Only be strong and very courageous.’

Review

We are about to read the great story of Israel's capture of the Promised Land, with the famous story of the defeat of Jericho and the spiritual as well as physical battles Joshua fought to enable God's people to take possession of the land He had prepared for them. It seems odd therefore, that we are suddenly presented with what appears like a technicality! Our passage today refers to a little known feature of the occupation, concerning land taken by the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh on the east of the Jordan, and not to the west in the region of land originally promised to Abraham (see Gen. 13).

Tribes outside the Promised Land! Our passage refers back to Numbers 32 to 34, where the leaders of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh decide that they would prefer to settle in the land on the east of the Jordan before the formal occupation took place. Note that Manasseh is called a 'half-tribe' (1:12) because their ancestor was one of the two sons of Joseph; and although Joseph was not named as a tribe, his sons Ephraim and Manasseh were named as half tribes. This incident nearly caused civil war within Israel at the time, because the other tribes of Israel thought that Reuben, Gad and Manasseh were attempting to break up the unity of God's people.

The story in Numbers 32 to 34 is fascinating because it took a great deal of diplomacy on the part of Moses and Aaron, and some hard bargaining, to establish the principles by which these three tribes would stay within the Israelite 'federation' despite their demand for land outside the formal 'Promised Land'. Part of the agreement arranged was that when the Jordan was to be crossed, the fighting men of these tribes, numbering around a quarter of Israel's fighting force, would stay with the Israelite army, crossing the Jordan in full battle dress. This would signify their intent to help their brothers take the Promised Land in full before returning to their preferred lands, formally negotiated to the east of the Jordan.

Once we have checked out the story in Numbers in this way, we gain our bearings for what is said in this passage; but why does the writer of this history of Israel feel it necessary to include this part of the story? It is of course interesting, but what significance does it have for the story of the occupation as a whole, and why is it given such prominence? There are two things which come from these questions, and they are genuinely important, both for the people of Israel, and for our understanding of how God works with His people.

How important is the unity of God's people? Firstly, the unity of God's people has always been a matter of the greatest importance. Indeed, the more we study the Bible, the more we will discover that this theme arises time and time again. It was completely anathema to Moses and to the majority of God's people that they should be divided, especially when facing important work to do (in this case, the taking of the Promised Land). Clearly, however, the leaders of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, were quite prepared to stretch the fellowship of Israel to the limit to get what they wanted, and we will find that their separation from the rest of Israel causes more trouble later on (see Joshua 22). Amidst the encouragement to be bold and strong (1:18), this story tells us the Joshua had to watch carefully for the unity of God's people. If he took his eye off this issue for one second, the potential divisions of Israel would be catastrophic.

Turning potential weakness into strength Secondly, this story about Reuben, Gad and Manasseh reminds us that God is willing and prepared to sustain the greater plan for His people despite all the problems created on the way. Joshua, having been given the divine commission to enter the Promised Land and complete God's covenant purposes for Israel, focuses his attention immediately to the greatest potential source of trouble, and faces it head on, and by requiring the warriors of the dissenting tribes to parade their intent (1:14), turns the problem into a show of strength. In return, the warriors of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh demand that Joshua be as strong and resolute as Moses; they will not take orders from a wimp or a shadow of a former leader, and make it clear that they will only take orders from one who is ruthless in judgement and ability to command (1:16f.). Notice that it is they who repeat the words we heard twice in God's previous blessing of Joshua; 'only be strong and very courageous.' (1:6,9,18).

It does not take much for us to spot the important spiritual consequences of this text. The unity of God's people remains deeply important to our Lord, and He longs for our weaknesses in such matters to be turned into strength. There is no way that we can escape the continual calls within scripture for all God's people to openly accept and work for their visible unity. God is One, and that is His glory; can we catch the vision?

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Read Numbers 32 – 34 which explain the background and discuss whether you believe the three tribes mentioned wanted to be a part of Israel or not.
2. What does this passage say to us about Christian unity today, if anything?
3. How can we turn our problems into solutions, and our disasters into victories? Share stories which illustrate this.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

By taking on the most serious potential problem within the tribes of Israel at this critical point, Joshua was immediately demonstrating the bold and courageous qualities necessary for him to lead Israel. In addition, this is yet another scripture where the message of the unity of God's people comes to the fore, and we cannot afford to ignore this. The battles ahead of Joshua were crucial for the future of Israel and God's plan of salvation for the whole world, and if we saw our own life and witness today as equally important for the future of our world, perhaps we would give this issue some credence again.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Pray for all those who find it hard to accept the unity of God's people, and only see the church in terms of those who agree with them in their understanding of spiritual matters. Continue to pray that we will see the day when God's people witness together to their Lord and their God.*
- *What spiritual battles need to be fought by God's people today? Talk about this with others and pray with them about how this can be done in today's complex world.*

Final Prayer

Lord God, stir your people into action by the power of Your Holy Spirit, we pray. Even if we do not understand what You are doing in our midst, take us step by step through the work