

- *How easy do you find it to follow what other people tell you to do, especially in the life of the church? Who are the great 'Joshua's' in the life of the church, that is, people who you and others are prepared to follow? Pray for those known to you who the Lord has anointed for leadership in the church today.*

Final Prayer

Lord Your hand guides in strange ways, and we do not always discern what You are doing. Help us to keep our eyes open our ears attuned and our hearts ready to act for you, and also ready to follow one who has been anointed by You to lead. Bless us in our discipleship we pray: AMEN

Prayer

Dear Lord, we long for Your glory to be shown among us. We pray that the love of Jesus will inspire acts of love and mercy, that God's righteousness will inspire truth and justice in our world, and that the power of the Holy Spirit will blow fresh inspiration into tired lives. May Your Kingdom come, and may all be given the chance to respond to Your love and receive Your grace and favour in salvation. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Barak Obama

Pray that the new administration in Washington will do its work in a godly way. Pray that Christian men and women at the heart of power will do their work for all in God's strength.

On-going prayers

- *Give thanks for water, for all it is used for, and for all it does*
- *Pray for all who work to improve education for all who most need it*
- *Pray for those going in to hospital for an operation or treatment*

Meditation

Would you see the Lord do great things in you?
Then repent and turn from all your sinfulness.

Would you know what is right and wrong?
Then open your heart to all God's revelation.

Would you know what God says in His Word?
Then let the Holy Spirit reveal its truth to you.

Would you know the power of God's Holy Spirit?
Then open up to Him your heart, mind and will.

Would you let the Lord take control of you?
Then walk the path of a disciple as Jesus taught.

Would you follow Jesus with all your being?
Then believe in Jesus and testify before others.

Would you see the Lord do great things in you?
Then follow the path of faith set out before you.

Bible Study - Joshua 3:7-17

⁷ *And the LORD said to Joshua, 'Today I will begin to make you great in the eyes of all Israel, so that they may know that just as I was with Moses, so I am with you. ⁸ You will instruct the priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant: "When you reach the edge of the waters, you will take your stand in the Jordan."⁹ Joshua said to the Israelites, 'Draw near and listen to the words of the LORD your God.'* ¹⁰ *Joshua said 'This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. ¹¹ Look, the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of all the earth will cross over in front of you into the Jordan. ¹² Now then, select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one*

from each tribe. ¹³ When the soles of the feet of the priests who carry the ark of the LORD (the Lord of all the earth) touch the waters of the Jordan, its waters flowing from upstream will pile up in a heap.'

¹⁴ So when the people broke camp to cross over the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went in front of them. ¹⁵ Now the Jordan overflows its banks during harvest season, but when the priests who carried the ark came to the edge of the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, ¹⁶ the water from upstream stood still, and piled up in a heap as far away as Adam, a city near Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely stopped. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood still on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until the whole nation had finished the crossing.

Review

The entry into Canaan is a formal story of great importance for the people of Israel, as was the escape from Egypt (Exodus 12-14) which set them on the journey that was now nearing its end. We cannot help but note the similarities between the crossing of the Red Sea and the crossing of the Jordan, in particular the holding back of the waters so that the people of Israel could cross. For them, the fulfilment of a promise of God was a sacred thing, to be marked with ceremony and with proper respect being shown to the holy things of God, such as the Ark of the Covenant.

As we read the story of the crossing of the Jordan, both today and tomorrow, we will find a number of places where the narrative seems to be repetitive. Today, we might judge this repetition unnecessary, and some translations of the Bible miss out some of the places where the river Jordan is mentioned, simply because it sounds tedious in English. However, the repetition is done partly for emphasis, and it comes from a time when storytelling was the primary means of passing on a story from one generation to another (see also 4:6), and repetition meant that important facts were not mistaken or passed down incorrectly. For example, the phrase 'the priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant...' (3:8,13,14,15,17), and 'cross over' (3:11,14,16,17). These expressions give the story line its flavour and sense of drama.

At the beginning, God told Joshua that he would perform a miracle in order to make him 'great in the eyes of all Israel' (3:7). It was all very well for Joshua to be Moses' chosen successor and for him to receive the blessing of God for this task (see chapter 1), but if he was to lead the people, they would need to see something happen which demonstrated that God was at work through him. Then there would be no dispute about Joshua's authority. There is little doubt that in the greater scheme of the book of Joshua, the personal authority Joshua gained on this occasion carried him through to the great military battle for the city of Jericho, where it was vital that everyone had complete faith in his instructions and his ability to convey what God required, for victory to be assured.

So Joshua gave the people detailed instructions about the forthcoming crossing of the river, as instructed by the Lord (3:7,8). The priests were to go ahead of the people at a distance (see 3:1-6), but when they reached the edge of the water (3:8) they were to stop, for God would perform a miracle (3:13). As Joshua told the people what to expect (3:9-13), he also told them to 'select twelve men ...' (3:12). This seems rather odd, and we are not told what they will have to do; but perhaps they had to be selected in advance, and in faith; for later, these twelve men had an important task to do in the middle of the river (4:4f.). The last part of our passage today (3:14-17) focuses on what happened when the people crossed over.

Joshua's instructions proved to be right, and when the people acted as instructed, the river stopped flowing as the priests' feet touched the water', and it 'piled up' further upstream to allow the people of Israel to cross over on the dry river bed (3:16,17). Everyone was able to cross, whilst the Ark of the Covenant was held in the middle of the river. There was no chasing army, as when the people of Israel had crossed the Red Sea, and other aspects of the two stories are different, but it was still a miraculous event that proved God was with His people, and that Joshua was their leader (3:7).

We should remember that of those who crossed the Jordan, only Joshua and Caleb had crossed the Red Sea. This great earlier event was the necessary proof of God's protection and guidance of His people, but those who entered the Promised Land had all been born since those times, and they needed to know the faithfulness of God for themselves. This great event provided that affirmation. Now, in every generation, God's people need to make the faith passed down to them their own, so that they have a personal experience of God and not just some generalised religious sentiment. In the church today, the one great sign used to illustrate this is baptism. Much of the symbolism of baptism goes back to the life of Jesus, and to His baptism when God confirmed His call and anointed Him with power to do His work. In addition, much of the symbolism of Jesus' baptism (and that of John the Baptist) goes back to the Israelite experience of being made anew into the people of God through turning away from the old life in Egypt and accepting the power and authority of God to direct them in a new life heading for the Promised Land. It was an experience acted out again in the crossing of the Jordan into the Promised Land.

Those crossing the Jordan needed to know God's presence not just with their ancestors but with them, so that they could do the tasks ahead. The Lord is no less present with us now as we do His will, and through Jesus and our response to Him, as symbolised by our baptism, we know that His promises are sure.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What is the connection between us today and the events of the crossing of the Red Sea and the crossing of the Jordan?
2. What kind of obedience is required of us if God is going to do His work through us today?
3. Does God work miracles like this today, and what is their purpose?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

It is important for us to see that these great stories of the Old Testament connect with us spiritually, in that great and consistent strand of human experience that tells us God is faithful, He guides His people, and He sets His people free. Sometimes wonderful things happen to us and we take little effort to record them. We forget that the remembrance of the acts of God is still essential to the faith, and people in later years will want to know what happened to us. What story of God's miracles will we tell?

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *If you were to speak of just one great event in which God has guided you into some new spiritual experience or new task, what would this be? Secondly, do you expect the Lord God to do anything more and take you further than you already know? Why not? Pray that the Lord will lead you into His future.*