

The Book of Joshua

Preparing for the Conquest of Canaan

Crossing the Jordan River

Text: Joshua 3 - 4

- I. Instructions for Preparing to Cross Jordan (Joshua 3:1-6)
 - A. The spies had returned with an encouraging report from the city of Jericho - the inhabitants of Canaan were afraid (cf. 2:9-11, 24; Exo. 15:1-16; 23:27; Deut. 2:25; 11:25; 28:10).
 - B. Early the next morning - demonstrating great faith - Joshua moved their camp to the bank of the Jordan River.
 1. No Canaanites came to hinder the Israelites from crossing the river.
 2. First, they were afraid of them and their God.
 3. Also, it was very difficult to cross the Jordan that far south.
 - a. The Jordan was shallow and easy to cross in the north (about 2.5 feet deep at the Sea of Galilee and 7 feet deep at Jabbok).
 - b. There were 41 fords between Galilee and the Jabbok, but only 5 between Jabbok and the Dead Sea).
 - c. "In 1854, an expert swimmer was unable to make it across the river near Jericho because the river was too wide and the current too strong."
 4. Finally, it was the time of harvest and the Jordan was flooded (vs. 15).
 - C. After three days, Joshua sent the officers of Israel through the camp with instructions for the people to prepare to cross into Canaan.
 - D. First, they were to watch and follow the ark or the covenant carried by the Levites.
 1. Up until this point, Israel had been led by the pillar of cloud/fire.
 2. Now, they would be guided by God's presence through His law and His priesthood.
 - E. Next, when they followed, they were to keep a distance of 2,000 cubits (about 3,000 feet) between them and the ark.
 1. This was a sign of respect and reverence.
 2. It also allowed them to see and to follow the ark.
 3. Even though they had not passed that way before, God did not leave them without guidance or instruction.
 - F. Finally, the people were to sanctify themselves in order to receive the wonders that God would do among them and to be able to follow His guidance.
 - G. When Joshua gave the command, the priest took up the ark and began the march toward the Jordan River and the land of Canaan - and the people followed!
- II. Instructions for the Crossing of Jordan (Joshua 3:7-13)
 - A. God promised to be with Joshua and to show wonders that proved His presence with Israel's new leader.
 - B. God told Joshua to command the priests who carried the ark to stand still when they came to the edge of the Jordan River.
 1. Moses had parted the Red Sea with his rod.
 2. The Jordan River would be parted with the Ark of the Covenant!

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- C. When the feet of the priests touched the water, the flow of the River would be stopped - as by a dam - and Israel would cross on dry ground.
- III. The Jordan River Crossed (Joshua 3:14-17)
- A. When the people obeyed, God carried out His will and kept His promise.
 - B. The flooded Jordan River ceased flowing and the waters stood up in a heap - forming a dam that allowed Israel to cross near Jericho.
 - C. The priests who carried the ark stood on dry ground in the midst of the river until the entire nation had crossed into the land of Canaan.
- IV. The Memorial of the Crossing (Joshua 4:1-11)
- A. God had commanded them to choose one man out of every tribe (3:12).
 - B. Now, the reason for that command is given - they were to take a stone each out of the midst of the Jordan River to build a memorial.
 - 1. The stones were to be taken from where the priests stood.
 - 2. They were to be placed in Gilgal, where Israel would encamp first in Canaan.
 - C. This memorial was to serve as a means of teaching their children about the events that happened upon their arrival in the land of Canaan.
 - 1. Compare with the Passover (Exo. 12:26-27)
 - 2. Compare with the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26)
 - D. There were two lessons to be emphasized by this memorial:
 - 1. God stopped the waters of the Jordan River to allow Israel to cross on dry ground.
 - 2. All people were to learn of the mighty hand of God and, thus, fear and reverence Him (vs. 24).
 - E. Joshua also set up a monument of 12 stones in the middle of the Jordan River, at the place where the priests stood.
 - 1. This served as evidence and a reminder that at one time, that ground had been dry.
 - 2. Whether hidden underwater or visible above the water, the purpose was the same.
 - F. After all the people crossed, then the priests followed carrying the Ark of the Covenant.
- V. Encampment in the Land of Canaan (Joshua 4:12-24)
- A. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh are mentioned as crossing the Jordan even though they had settled on the east side of the river.
 - B. They were fulfilling their promise to help their brethren fight for the land of Canaan.
 - C. The date for Israel's entering Canaan is the 10th day of the 1st month.
 - D. Their first encampment was in Gilgal.
 - 1. It was not known as Gilgal at this time.
 - 2. It was not called Gilgal until after the circumcision of the Israelites (5:9).
 - E. Thus, the children of Israel came into the Land of Canaan.