

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 3

JOSHUA

CHAPTER 3

Memory Verse for the Week -- Joshua 3:5 – “And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.”

INTRODUCTION

The Israelites were now at the threshold of entering the Promised Land.¹ Joshua was chosen to lead the Israelites into the Land. God promised Joshua that He would be with him and would never forsake him as He was with Moses. Joshua

¹ Genesis 15:18 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: 19

Exodus 3:8 And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

was encouraged after the two spies had brought back the report to him. He praised the LORD that He would deliver the people and the land of Canaan to them. However, they had an immediate great obstacle to overcome. It was the Jordan River, which at this time was overflowing, and rendered it impossible to cross. The Israelites numbered about two million in addition to their livestock, carts and belongings. It would be a mammoth task for Joshua to organize and lead the people across. Joshua would face the beginning of a series of his many tests of faith in God.

The mission was of global and eternal significance. The Messiah has to come from a nation. All the nations on earth originate from man. God has designed His own nation His Anointed. Israel was that nation. The conquest of the Land was the final piece of the puzzle for the formation of that nation. To be a nation three elements must exist together. There must be the people (Israel has more than 2 million), the Constitution including the religious, moral and civil laws (which Israel received from the LORD in Mount Sinai) and lastly the land. With a Land for the nation to exist, Israel will remain as the PEOPLE of Israel rather than the NATION of Israel.

The conquest of the Land of Canaan was in fulfilment of prophesy (see Genesis 15). The sins of the

Canaanites were full and Israel was on a mission from GOD. It was not a manmade land grabbing conquest. That would be carnal. It was a spiritual exercise from the start to finish. Therefore Israel has no right to make changes to the mission status. Whatever the LORD determines, Israel was to follow explicitly to the last jot and tittle. Crossing the River Jordan in the manner determined by the LORD was a very good start to jolt the flagging spirit and faith of 2 million non combatants fighting for their lives and the cause of Jesus Christ. It was a spiritual warfare and not a carnal one that Israel must never forget. To forget would mean death and destruction and failure. A failure that the world could not afford for our eternal destiny is in their weak hands.

The following is a suggested outline of the chapter:

1. The Final Preparation (vv. 1-6)
2. The Promised Exaltation (vv.7-8)
3. The Final Briefing (vv. 9-13)
4. The Actual Crossing (vv. 14-17)

COMMENTARY

The Final Preparation – 3:1-6

Joshua “rose early” that morning to cross the Jordan River. They must be no delay. The

Canaanites would not expect such a crossing. With the River Jordan overflowing her banks, the Canaanites would feel safe and secure. This acted as a barrier preventing the Israelites from crossing and thus buying the Canaanites more time to prepare.

The people of Israel packed and moved from Shittim to the banks of the Jordan River, where they stayed for three days. During the three days, the leaders made sure that the people were ready to cross as planned. The people were told that they should be looking at “the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God” (v.3). They were not to move until they could see the priests, the Levites, carrying the Ark. Then they were to follow the Ark. The “ark of the covenant” was a rectangular golden-plated wooden box-like structure measuring 2 ½ by 1½ by 1½ cubits (one cubit is about 50 centimetres). Resting on top of this Ark was the cover, measuring 2½ by ½ by ½ cubits, which was made of pure gold. This gold piece cover was called “the mercy seat”. On both ends of the mercy seat, two cherubim were made to stand above the Ark (Exodus 25:10-22).²

² Exodus 25:21 And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. 22 And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which *are* upon the ark of the testimony, of all *things* which I will

The “ark of the covenant” represents the presence of the LORD God. As the Israelites moved to cross the river led by “the ark of the covenant” borne by the priests, they must keep a distance of about two thousand cubits (about 1,000 metres) between them. This allowance of about two thousand cubits between the Ark and the people would enable all of them to see the Ark as it was carried across the river. Another point of keeping the distance was that God is holy. It was the same at Mount Sinai where the people were told not to come near when the LORD descended on it (Exodus 19:20-23).³ Observe that it was the LORD God who led the children of Israel and not Joshua their leader. We should always look to God and let Him lead us. Behind every godly leader is God Almighty. God gave us His written revelation for us to know and obey Him.

Then Joshua spoke to all the people. He commanded them: “sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you” (v.5). Joshua showed great faith that God would perform “wonders” before

give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.

³ Exodus 19:21 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish.

the people. Joshua believed that somehow God would perform a miracle to make it possible for all the two million Israelites to cross the river safely as planned. God would soon reveal to him. But for the moment the people must “sanctify” themselves. The Israelites would have to exercise their faith in the LORD God and not to doubt. God was going to lead them. To doubt God is to be unbelieving and unbelief is sin. At Mount Sinai when God appeared to Moses at the mountain top, the people were told to sanctify themselves. Their sanctification perhaps required them to wash their clothes and to abstain from marital relationship. Joshua would command the Israelites to obey these two requirements. The people could have washed their clothes by the Jordan River. Then Joshua commanded the priests to bear “the ark of the covenant” on their shoulders and to go forward before the people.

The Promised Exaltation – 3:7-8

The LORD spoke to Joshua. The LORD purposed to “begin to magnify” him before the people. God was going to make Joshua great. The tense of the verb is such that it was not a one time act but continuous as long as Joshua remained faithful and trusting in the LORD. This coming miracle was the first of many more to come. God also revealed to him the immediate purpose of magnifying

Joshua. This miracle would confirm the leadership of Joshua. God had heard what the people said to Joshua earlier. The people said that they would obey Joshua only if God was with him just as He was with Moses (1:17). Joshua and the people needed this assurance very much at this juncture of his leadership and their preparation to conquer the Land.

In addition, the LORD instructed Joshua precisely what to command the priests who bore “the ark of the covenant”. The priests who bore the Ark should walk to the edge of the Jordan River, then move to the middle of the river, and stand on the spot (vv.8, 17). This action requires a mighty act of faith on the part of Joshua and the priest carrying the Ark. If the River did not stop flowing as they stepped forth into the fast flowing river, their lives would be lost and the Ark would fall in and disappear beneath the current.

Joshua must not doubt that God could and would stop the fast flowing waters of the Jordan River. His faith was based on past experiences he had when God parted the Red Sea. But more importantly, it was based upon the faithfulness of the LORD his God. Joshua’s faith was not based on any imagination of his mind or inner feelings. He had every reason to doubt for everything his physical eyes see is against what the LORD asks

him to command the priests to do. Science and nature are apparently against his belief in God’s Word. His faith was not blind faith that is not based on substantial facts. He knew clearly now the meaning of God’s promise that He would be with him as He was with Moses. God’s power was going to be performed through Joshua as it was with Moses.

The Final Briefing – 3:9-13

Joshua now spoke to the children of Israel. He called the people “to hear the words of the LORD your God” (v.9). Joshua did not call the people to hear him or to hear what God said to him. He called the people to hear *God*; he directed their attention to God, not himself. The word, “hear” (Heb. *shama*) has a rich connotation. It does not simply mean the use of the ear to hear. In biblical usage, it always means to listen attentively, understand and obey.

Joshua told the people that they would know that “the living God is among you” (v.10). He directed the attention of the children of Israel to God and not man. God was in the midst of them as represented by “the ark of the covenant of the LORD”. This God is the living and true God, who created the heavens and the earth. He is not one of the gods of the pagans, which are not gods at all. Joshua then reminded them of God’s

promise to give the Land to Israel. God would “without fail drive out” the inhabitants of the land. Seven tribes were mentioned: the *Canaanites* [living in the regions of north-eastern Palestine and Syria]; the *Hittites* [a warring people living from the Black Sea down to Israel], the *Hivites* [the descendents of Hamor the Hivite, who abducted and raped Dinah Jacob’s daughter by Leah, [Genesis 34:1ff]; the *Perizzites* [origin unknown except given in the Bible]; the *Girgashites* [closely related to the Canaanites, and later known as Phoenicians]; the *Amorites* [an ancient Semitic-speaking people living in Syria and Palestine]; and the *Jebusites* [living around Jerusalem which was then called Jebus] (v.10).

Joshua next called the people to behold “the ark of the covenant of the LORD of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan” (v.11). Joshua used a different name to refer to the Ark. But in verse 13, this phrase is used, “the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan.” The word “Lord” is not the same word, which is spelt in capitals, “LORD” (meaning YAHWEH). The lower case “Lord” in Hebrew is “*adonai*” which means: master or ruler. Joshua was emphasizing that the LORD was Master or Ruler of “all the earth.” Joshua was stressing the sovereignty of God over all the earth, and Canaan

in particular.⁴ And this Almighty God is the LORD God of Israel, Israel’s personal God. The inhabitants of the land of Canaan had to recognize the sovereignty of the one true and living God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). He has the right to every real estate on the earth, and He gives to whom He wills; just as He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy.⁵ The Ark would pass before them first meaning the LORD will fight for Israel.

Joshua then instructed the people to choose twelve men, one man from each tribe. He did not mention at this point the reason for choosing the twelve men. He told the people that when the feet of the priests, who bore “the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth” touched the waters of the Jordan River and stood in the midst of the waters; the flowing waters of the river would be divided. The waters, which came from the upper reaches of the river, would stop flowing, and the waters flowing down would be cut off. We learn for the first time what would happen when the priests walked into the Jordan River. This was a similar

⁴ Psalm 24:1 <A Psalm of David.> The earth is the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

⁵ Romans 9:15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

miracle but not the same, which they had witnessed at the Red Sea. Nothing is impossible with God, only if He wills to do the miracles.

The Actual Crossing – 3:14-17

The hour finally arrived for the Israelites to enter the Promised Land. There were three groups of people: the priests who bore the Ark, the twelve men, and the rest of the people. The priests moved ahead first bearing “the ark of the covenant” before the people. Obviously, Joshua and the twelve men (one from each tribe) followed the priests, and lastly all the people followed. As soon as the feet of the priests who carried the Ark touched the edge of the water of the river, the waters which flowed from the upper reaches of the Jordan River were piled up in a heap (v.16a). At this time, Jordan River was overflowing with water. It was flood time in spring, and the melting snows of Mount Hermon, would cause the Jordan River to swell to a hundred feet wide and about three to ten feet deep. It was not possible to wade through the torrential and raging waters. The timing of the waters, which piled up as a heap at the city of Adam (about twenty miles upstream), and did not flow down was amazing. Moreover, the “wall” of water at Adam had to be retained until all the children of Israel had crossed over. In addition, the riverbed, which was soft, became firm,

for the Israelites walked on dry ground. Then the timing of the returning flow of the river took place only after the priests who carried the Ark left the riverbed and reached the other side. The consideration of these factors happening simultaneously makes the event a most amazing miracle. It required the power of God. The place where the Israelites crossed and made camp was very near the city of Jericho. In other words, Jericho was in front of them.

The priests held “the ark of the covenant” in the middle of the river until the last Israelite had crossed over to Canaan. They must have held the Ark for quite a long time. Two million Israelites crossed over on that day; and until the last person had crossed over, the priests could not abandon their position. They were now in enemy territory, and before them stood the fortified city of Jericho and beyond that the rest of Canaan. God had promised that He would magnify Joshua. He did it by this miracle and exalted Joshua before all the people.

PRACTICAL VALUE

The spiritual and practical benefits that we can learn from this chapter are not few. Once again, we are shown clearly that God’s promises are true. He promised to exalt Joshua before the people so that they would accept his leadership. God performed

it in a mighty way. On the other hand, Joshua was humble and obedient to all that God told him to do without question. Joshua gave glory to God. He never directed the people to himself. God will use such a man to do His work and for His glory. What a privilege and pleasure to serve the LORD our God!

Throughout the preparation to cross over to the western side of the Jordan River, the Israelites had been submissive and cooperative. They listened and obeyed Joshua in everything that he told them to do. The priests obeyed, twelve men were duly chosen, and the rest of the people, young and old, men and women, and children moved orderly or at least moved quickly across. This teaches us that unity and harmony among pastors, leaders and members of a church is essential to successfully do the work of God. Of course, God's work must be done in God's way for God's glory.

The Jordan River posed an insurmountable barrier to the Israelites but if it is God's Will for them to cross over, nothing is an obstacle. Rather one should see such obstacles as opportunities. Using this historic incident as an analogy, what is our Jordan River that prevents us from receiving God's promise and blessings? Is there any obstacle in our life that we see as impossible to

overcome and we are presently being robbed of our blessing? Turn to God and seek His Word and His Will, and see what God can do if we submit and obey Him! And remember that when we want to do God's will, we need to sanctify or consecrate ourselves – confess our sins and put away our sins through repentance and submission to God. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Joshua 3:1-6; Numbers 14:1-10; Romans 8:31, 32.

TUESDAY: Joshua 3:7-8; Exodus 19:14-15; 2 Timothy 2:16-26.

WEDNESDAY: Joshua 3:9-13; Hebrews 12:1-2; James 4:7.

THURSDAY: Joshua 3:14-17; Exodus 14:21-31;

FRIDAY: Joshua 3:1-17; Acts 5:1-16; Psalm 24:1-5.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you reply someone who wears a sloppy and immodest garment (male or female) in worship and when pointed out replied, "it is the heart that matters in worship, the external is not important"? Do you think our church members dress appropriately for worship?

2. Why was sanctification needed to cross the River Jordan? Could they not cross successfully without it?

3. Is it important to affirm and confirm the leadership of the new leader in the eyes of the people? Is it more important to the new leader or the people following him?

4. What would you say to the account that archaeological data shows that God caused an earthquake to stop the river Jordan?

5. In what way was the crossing of river Jordan a miracle?

6. What have you learned about God or how you ought to live the Christian life?
