

3. What great events do you remember in the life of your church, and why are they important, spiritually.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

It seems to me that this scripture was written down with great sensitivity and respect because it describes the act of taking the Promised Land. Before this, the people were outside, and after it, they were inside, but facing a battle. It is sad that the whole event is known well today and Christians are not aware of the spiritual significance of it because the structure of the story is somewhat tedious to us. A little understanding and research can go a long way to rectify such issues within the Bible, and this passage is a good lesson in why we all need to be prepared to do a little more work than just read the story for ourselves. My own understanding would be limited without reading work done by others.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- To what extent would you say that you are an 'obedient' person? Pray, and ask God this question about yourself, and see if you are not challenged about one or two aspects of your life that the Lord wishes to draw to your attention ...!
- Draw a map of the great spiritual moments of your own life, and examine it to see whether there are any patterns within what has happened to you. What might the Lord have next for you, given what has gone before?

Final Prayer

Bless the special time we set aside each day to spend with You, Lord God. If we have been challenged, guide us in our response; if we have been at rest with Your, move us on. May we always be responsive to the guidance of Your Spirit, and may we return to You each day with hope, confidence and joy. AMEN

Prayer

Commission us, O Lord, to do Your will as You would have us do;
Prepare us for all that lies ahead, and help us by Your strength;
Empower us to do the right, with love and grace and peace;
Encourage us to speak the truth, according to Your Word;
Draw us closer to Yourself, and may Your Kingdom come;
Glory be to You, Lord Jesus; may Your work be done! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Local Services

Pray today for local politicians and community leaders who represent the area in which you live. Pray for wise, good and sensible local decision making in the interests of all.

On-going prayers

- Pray for missionaries and agencies attempting to feed the starving
- Give thanks for people who have recently been saved by grace
- Pray for school teachers across the world and the work they do

Meditation

Rejoice to see the start of every day;
Believe the providential power of God
And see at work His universal laws
Of goodness, faith and hope and love.

Dispel the demons of today's despair;
The awful power of evil's dark intentions,
Driving backwards all for which we truly care
Towards the misery of loveless gloom.

Let God's power reign here and now
And hear Christ Jesus say, 'No contest!'
For deep within, the Spirit claims the ground
So we by faith can taste the victory He's won!

Bible Study - Joshua 4:10-24

¹⁰ For the priests who carried the ark stood in the middle of the Jordan until everything that the LORD commanded Joshua to tell the people to do was finished, and just as Moses had instructed Joshua. The people passed over in haste. ¹¹ When all the people had finished crossing, the ark of the LORD and the priests crossed over in the sight of the people. ¹² The men of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over armed in the sight of the people of Israel, as Moses had instructed them. ¹³ About 40,000 men armed for war passed over before the LORD to the plains of Jericho, ready for battle.

¹⁴ On that day the LORD raised up Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they revered him just as they had revered Moses, all the days of his life.

¹⁵ And the LORD said to Joshua, ¹⁶ 'Command the priests bearing the ark of the testimony to come up out of the Jordan.' ¹⁷ So Joshua commanded the priests, 'Come up out of the Jordan.' ¹⁸ The priests came up from the middle of the Jordan carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and when they set foot on dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and flowed over all its banks, as before.

¹⁹ The people came up from the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they set up camp at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho. ²⁰ Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken from the Jordan, ²¹ and said to the Israelites, 'In the future, when your children ask their fathers, 'What do these stones mean?' ²² then you will tell them, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' ²³ For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you crossed over, just as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up in front of us until we had crossed over. ²⁴ He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is strong, and that you may fear the LORD your God forever.'

Review

This passage from Joshua completes the story of the crossing of the Jordan, and it follows the pattern of the story we discovered previously (4:1-9). Most of this reading repeats what we already know about the crossing; the ark was held in the middle of the river by Levitical priests until all had crossed over (4:10), and it was brought through at the very end, signalling a return of the water of the Jordan (4:15-18). Lastly, the meaning of the story is emphasised again (see 4:3-9) and the connection between the crossing of the Jordan and the Red Sea is confirmed (4:21-24). Although the story seems repetitive, there are a number of points within it worth our further attention. If you have the time, I suggest that you glance at the structure of the story we identified in our last study (see below), because this helps us understand why certain story elements crop up in the order we find them.

Following God's instructions There is considerable emphasis here on the Lord's detailed instructions for the crossing of the Jordan. For example, the holding of the ark at the centre of the river is a clear command given to Joshua by both the Lord and by Moses, and the leaving of the river by the priests holding the ark is done at Joshua's command (4:16,17). The whole event is covered with a sense of holiness as God worked amongst His people. Times and cultures change, of course, but we too, know what it is like to feel such a presence of the Lord, and we too may have experienced a sense of awe at what God is doing. This, of course, is what the ancient writers sought to convey by what they wrote, even though the story line seems a little pedantic to us.

As if to emphasise this sense of awe, we are told that the entire people of Israel crossed, and did so in 'haste' (4:10). We might think that the crossing took some time because of the lengthy description in scripture, but this little word indicates the powerful connection with the crossing of the Red Sea. Before that great event, the people were urged by Moses to prepare 'in haste' (Ex 12:11,33), and the narrative in Exodus 12 and 14 leaves us in no doubt that prompt obedience to the Lord was necessary, and there was no time for delay or prevarication. God's will had a time and a date 'stamp' upon it! Certainly, the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh (4:12,13) promptly fulfilled their pledge to Moses and Joshua (1:12-18) by crossing, together with the rest of Israel, ready for war. After all had crossed, an army of 40,000 stood ready to do the Lord's will; they had shown their obedience under the leadership of Joshua, and were fit to do God's will.

Joshua's authority The success of this crossing meant that Joshua was seen by the people as the rightful successor of Moses. It is possible that Moses' authority was only ever fully established after the people of Israel had escaped from Egypt, even though he had led Israel by dealing with Pharaoh on their behalf for some time. In this passage, Joshua's call to lead was accepted by people who discovered that when they did what Joshua said, they were blessed by God. This is a powerful lesson to leaders of God's people today that although they may be ordained or appointed (in whatever fashion), it is only when people begin to see the spiritual fruits of their leadership that they will fully accept their spiritual authority.

The meaning of the crossing We have already been told that the people of Israel were to remember the crossing (4:6f.), and that the setting up of the twelve stone monument was the essential sign of this (4:9). There is some confusion about this, because in our passage today, it says that Joshua had the stones set up in Gilgal (4:19,20), when it seems that the setting of the stone monument has already been described earlier (4:9) just after the crossing of the Jordan. If you check the structure of the story (below) and the translation I gave in the previous study for 4:9, you can be assured that the two passages describe just one event, and the repetition is part of the story telling, and not some reason to doubt the 'truth' of the story (as some do).

There is one last feature of this whole story, and it helps us obtain some understanding of what this meant to the Israelites who entered the Promised Land after so many years of wandering in the wilderness. If you look carefully, you will find that the whole story is dominated by two phrases, one being 'crossed over', and the other is 'in the sight of' (or 'before' or 'in front of', which are all the same and one simple word in Hebrew). Of course, the whole story is about 'crossing over', but the second phrase tells us that what happened was a public event; it was something done by God that was seen by everyone, and moreover, God saw the people doing what He had commanded. Indeed, this Hebrew phrase is frequently placed adjacent to the word for the 'ark' or 'the Lord' to make just this point. This may be only a small detail of the language, but spiritually it is crucial. When God acts visibly in the midst of His people, some great work is being done which is important to God's greater plan of salvation. Great events do not often happen in history, but when they do, they must be recorded properly, so that future generations might know.

ADDENDUM - Story structure for the crossing of the Jordan

- A Preparations for Crossing with the Ark – 3:1-6
 - B God's promise to establish Joshua as a leader – 3:7
 - C Instructions for taking the Ark into the Jordan – 3:8,9
 - D Instruction to replace the nations of Canaan – 3:10,11
 - E Selection of the twelve men – 3:12
 - F THE CROSSING – 3:13-17**
 - e Selection of twelve men – 4:1,2
 - d Instructions for taking the stones and their meaning – 4:3-9
 - c Instructions for removing the Ark from the Jordan – 4:10-13
 - b God establishes Joshua as a great leader – 4:14
 - a Completion of the crossing of the Jordan – 4:15-24

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Check out verses 9 and 20 in chapter 4 in your own Bible and discuss the differences between the two in your group.
2. Should church leaders expect God's people to give respect because of the nature of their office or because of what they manage to do?