

Church of God Sunday School

CROSSING THE JORDAN

Joshua 3:1 – 5:1

The day the children of Israel had waited for so long was finally here. It was time to cross into the Promised Land. How exciting it must have been! For more than forty years, they had looked forward to this day!

When Joshua and the people of Israel reached the Jordan River, they found the river was swollen with the spring rains. It was overflowing its banks. Even at its shallowest place, the people could not wade through. It would be dangerous to try to swim across, for the current was very strong. The spies had crossed over just a few days before, but now there was a large multitude of men, women, children, and all their possessions. How were they all going to get to the other side?

After three days of waiting, officers went throughout the camp, giving the people instructions on what they were to do. When the people saw the Ark of the Covenant and the priests begin to move, they were to follow it. Also, they were not to get too close to the ark. They were told to stay 2000 cubits away (about ½ mile). If some of the people got too close, they would have blocked others' view of the ark. All the people needed to see and follow.

Why was Israel told to follow the Ark of the Covenant? ". . . for ye have not passed this way heretofore [before]." The Lord was going to use the Ark of the Covenant to lead His people into the land of Canaan.

After the officers had given their instructions, Joshua spoke to the people, "Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the LORD will do wonders among you." The people must have been curious as to what exactly God was going to do. Do you think they might have remem-

bered the crossing of the Red Sea? We know the people of Jericho had heard about *that* miracle, and it caused them to be afraid (Joshua 2:11).

God spoke to Joshua and told him, "This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee." Previously, God had promised to be with Joshua (Joshua 1:5), but now all of Israel would see that Joshua was the leader God had chosen.

God gave Joshua instructions for the priests: they were to "stand still in Jordan." Joshua told Israel that as soon as the bottom of the priests' feet stepped into the Jordan River, the waters would stop flowing.

So, the people gathered up their tents and followed the ark to the river's edge. When the feet of the priests just "dipped in the brim of the water," the waters "stood and rose up upon a heap."

While the priests stood still, "on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan," all of Israel "passed over on dry ground." Not only did God

stop the flow of the river, but He dried up the muddy riverbed too.

What a miracle! Once again God had taken care of His people in a wonderful way! God knew the days ahead would be hard. There were many battles with the Canaanites to be fought. But God had promised to "drive [them] out from before" the Israelites. This parting of the Jordan would serve as a reminder of God's almighty power!

After all of the people had crossed the Jordan, God told Joshua to have one man from each of the twelve tribes gather a stone from the Jordan where the priests stood and take it to where the Israelites would be



staying that night.

These stones were to create a "sign [memorial] among you." Then, when the Israelites' children would "in time to come," ask their fathers, "What mean ye by these stones?" they could tell how God had cut off the flow of the Jordan River. "And these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever."

Joshua, too, "set up twelve stones," but he placed them in the middle of the Jordan River, right where the priests stood. This was also a memorial as to what God had done.

When all the people had crossed the Jordan, God told Joshua to command the priests to "Come ye up out of Jordan." As soon as the priests' feet touched dry land, the water "flowed over all his banks, as they did before."

The children of Israel traveled to Gilgal, where

they camped. There the twelve memorial stones were set up, and again, Joshua told the people why. It was so that they could tell their children of how God had dried up the Jordan River, just as He dried up the waters of the Red Sea.

Soon Israel's enemies "heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel," until they all passed over. Israel's enemies were so afraid that "their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more."

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**MEMORY VERSE:**

*" . . . God dried up the waters of Jordan . . . That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD . . . "*

—Joshua 4:23-24

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