

Prayers

Opening prayer

Almighty Lord and God, receive my prayers today;
Forgive my wayward nature, and listen to my heartfelt concerns;
Fill me with Your power and love, and tell me what I need to hear;
Make me complete in You, so I may praise You all my life;
Almighty Lord and God, receive my prayers today; AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme for the week: vision

1. For yourself

Pray today in quietness, waiting on God for what He will show you about yourself and your spiritual journey

2. For your friends and family

Lift each of your friends and family to the Lord and seek His blessing on their lives

3. For the church and its work

Lift the church fellowship of which you are apart to the Lord in prayer, waiting for what the Lord will say to you about your relationship with the church.

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray for the time to come when Jesus will come in glory to bring this world of evil to a close, and when God will justly judge the world and all who are in it

Meditation

Sin persists, as a fearsome and persistent enemy;
It suggests, tempts, and draws us into its deception.

We wander slowly from the truth we know, little by little,
And find too quickly we have strayed away from God.

We come across some task that faith requires of us,
And the devil whispers, 'Surely not!' So we don't do it.

We hold on to awful habits, not thinking they are bad,
And fail to let the Lord deliver us from our daily sins.

We accept the vices of our culture; casual sex, dishonesty ...
And turn away from what the Bible says about morality.

We reserve the right to speak as we wish, to say what we think,
And forget the wisdom of precise and thoughtful speech.

Save us, Father, and give us courage to face the enemy,
To reject his temptations, and turn ourselves again, to You.

Bible Study

Bible passage – Joshua 4: 1-9

¹ When the whole nation had finished crossing over the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua,

² 'Select twelve men from the people, one man from each tribe, ³ and instruct them to take up twelve stones from here in the middle of the Jordan, from the exact place

where the priests' feet stood. Bring them over with you and place them down where you lodge tonight.'

⁴ Then Joshua called the twelve men (one from each tribe) he had appointed from the people of Israel, ⁵ and said to them,

'Cross over into the midst of the Jordan in front of the ark of the LORD your God, and each of you must take a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, ⁶ so that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in the future,

"What do these stones mean to you?"

⁷ then you will answer,

"The flow of the waters of the Jordan stopped before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. The waters ceased when it passed over the Jordan."

So these stones will be a memorial for the people of Israel forever.'

⁸ So the people of Israel did as Joshua commanded them and took up twelve stones out of the midst of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, just as the LORD told Joshua. They carried them over with them to the place where they lodged and set them down there. ⁹ And Joshua set up as a monument the twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood.

They are there to this day.

Review

Yesterday we read about how the people of Israel crossed the river Jordan into Canaan. In today's passage, the story is partially repeated but in a special way. Our reading is really about the meaning of this great crossing, because it describes the collecting of twelve stones from the river bed and the establishment of a monument, made of these stones, to be used as a memorial of the event in times to come (4:6,7).

Old Testament stories can often surprise us because they follow unfamiliar ancient patterns of storytelling. For example, it may seem strange to us that in verse 2, after the nation had crossed the river (4:1), Joshua was commanded to select twelve men, one from each of the tribes of Israel. Now, the rest of the passage tells us what they did, and how they gathered stones from the middle of the river bed while the Ark was still there and set them up as a monument (4:8,9); but why have we been told about their selection? They had already been selected previously (3:12), just before the crossing, but at that point we were not told why! We might think this is incidental or just an accident of the story, but it is not.

The great story of the crossing of the Jordan into Canaan follows a pattern of storytelling with a structure that goes by the name of 'chiastic'. It is often found in the Bible, and here in Joshua 3 and 4, it is best explained in this diagram;

- 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

If you have an opportunity to look at this and check it against the Bible, you will gain a greater understanding of the story. This will enable you to appreciate why not only do we have two descriptions of the selection of twelve men, but it explains why much of what we have already been told about the crossing appears to be repeated in chapter 4. This method of storytelling placed the most important fact (as we would call it) at the centre of the narrative, but by looking at the whole structure, we can see how it highlights different features of the story.

The passage we have read today tells us how the stones were removed from the Jordan and that they were to be set up as a memorial (4:7). In addition, by checking the equivalent section in the build up of the chiastic structure (3:10,11), we discover that the twelve stones were also to symbolise the twelve tribes of

Israel that would replace the existing nations living in Canaan. Because we tend to read the story merely sequentially, we may fail to spot an important point such as this. Indeed, our impression is that the monument of stones would be purely a monument to the miracle of the crossing, and something future generations should be taught (4:6). The greater symbolism of the monument as a witness to God's guidance and the coming invasion of Canaan is confirmed at the end of chapter 4, where this is exactly what is said, in summary of the whole story (4:23,24).

One important point we can glean from this study is that it is not enough merely to remember the facts of history and say 'God did that'. When God acts in power, he does remarkable things that should be remembered in full. In this story, God brought His people through the Jordan. As a pure miracle, it was not as dramatic as the crossing of the Red Sea; but if we remember that the monument was intended to symbolise entry into Canaan and the conquest of the Promised Land, then we realise that the completion of Israel's journey was as important as the beginning of it!

We will continue in the coming studies to work our way through Joshua 4, but whereas we have been content so far to follow the sequence of the story as it unfolds, from now onwards we will have to use the chiasmic map. This will help us explain the rest of the story, because without it, we will simply be left wondering why things that have already been described are repeated!

Going Deeper

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. Discuss the chiasmic structure identified in this story. What does this structure tell us about the crossing of the Jordan?
2. What was the importance of taking twelve stones from where the priests stood who were carrying the Ark?
3. How can we encourage children to be interested in the great signs and symbols of our faith, for example, the Cross?

Discipleship challenges

- *You probably have objects in your house that you place specially so that you remember certain people or events; most people do, and it is quite natural. Would it not therefore be helpful if we did something similar for the great spiritual events in our lives? Think creatively about what God has done for you, and consider how you should 'remember' it.*
- *Pray for those who find scripture too hard to understand and feel it is beyond them when people begin to discuss complex things. Pray that they will have their eyes opened to the exciting things to be found in God's Word.*

Final Prayer

Glorious Lord, conquer our fears, have victory over our inhibitions, dispel our doubts and calm our failing nerves. Then, when we have found our peace in You, may we praise You with all our being, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN
