

Joshua 3

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 30 June 2017 15:39

The people of Israel had already experienced God's mercy, by defeating the Amorites who opposed them. Now they were to live through a great miracle, the stopping of the river Jordan. This would be followed by yet other miracles. In this the people saw God in action, and came to see that Joshua was indeed God's man. If you know a man is of God, listen to him, insofar as he teaches God's word and his actions are true, for this is what we must all do.

Verse 1

1.

And Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over.

The actual time scale is not given here: Joshua arose early in the morning sometime after receiving the report from the two spies. Any consequent activity after that would have taken a great deal of logistics and planning, unless God Himself gave Joshua direct commands to act straight away. All the tribes moved on to the east bank of the Jordan, by the crossing points, and erected their tents for a short stay.

Very often God can instruct us to do this or that without us knowing what comes next, or what to do. He will then give further instructions at a later date, maybe to commit to action instantly, even if we have no humanly logical reasons to do so – it comes down to trust in God.

Verses 2-4

1.

And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host;

2.

And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it.

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3.

Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore.

It seems reasonable to assume that the 'three days' was after the tribes had moved to the east of the Jordan river. The people were allowed three days to settle, then 'officers' began to circulate amongst them. The term 'officers' can refer to those who ruled the people, such as magistrates, or other leaders, with an emphasis on scribes, who often had dual jobs to do.

These rulers passed on the orders from Joshua. They told the people to look out for a procession of priests (Levites) carrying the Ark of the Covenant. They would move towards the river, and the entire nation of Hebrews were to follow after it, but at a safe distance of 2,000 cubits. The numeral given can mean many thousands, but it would appear that the word 'cubits' restricts the number to an actual 2,000, because it qualifies the number. (On other occasions a 'thousand', for example, often meant ten thousand). Thus, the people had to maintain a distance of roughly half a mile from the Ark and the Levites.

The instruction was to stay well away from the Ark, but close enough to see where the priests were taking it. Such was the holy awe towards the Ark. Keeping it in sight also had a practical aspect to it – this was a new route to take, so the Ark was to be the guide. No doubt God told the priests and Joshua where to cross the river.

Too many believers think following what God says must be some kind of unknowable matter. But, God often gives detailed orders to follow, so it was not left to human devices or thinking. Indeed, this is what the Bible does – it gives us God's precise commands so that we will not fail by using our own finite minds.

Verses 5-8

1.

And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the LORD will do wonders among you.

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2.

And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people.

3.

And the LORD said unto Joshua, 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.

4.

And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan.

There is much in this account to remind us of what happened forty years previously. Joshua told the people they had to sanctify themselves. This was a command, not an option (as the word '**amar**' signifies). For the people of Israel this entailed both personal and ritual actions. To sanctify, **qadash**, was to prepare themselves for what was to come. This included dedicating themselves to God and His cause, and to purify their minds, hearts and bodies. This was a prerequisite to the wonders that would be shown in their midst 'tomorrow'. This literally meant the next day (when they started to follow the priests), but also the days that followed – God would actively show them miracles. God wished to prove Joshua to be the man chosen to follow Moses, and so miracles would be performed as a sign of this.

Joshua commanded the Levites to pick up the Ark by its sacred poles and to start off slowly, as the nation looked on with immense expectation. They would not be disappointed! When the priests began their delicate journey, Jehovah spoke to Joshua, telling him that this very day He would make Joshua look great before the people, so they would know God was with both Joshua and them.

God told Joshua to give exact orders to the Levites – when they reached the water's edge they must stand still. This all seems to have happened in silence as holy import fell upon the people

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and the priests. As Christians we need not rush about or seek God's input immediately. He may often want us to be quiet, to be still before Him, before He acts. Patience is a great virtue when waiting for Almighty God to act.

Verses 9-13

1.

And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the LORD your God.

2.

And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites.

3.

Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan.

4.

Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man.

5.

And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap.

Joshua gathered the people together... obviously only those who were closest to Joshua could hear his voice. The tribal chiefs and officials therefore passed on the words: 'Listen to Jehovah 'elohiym... the sign that He is with us all, is that the Canaanites will be driven out before us, giving us victory.' He is the "living God" – necessary to say given that Canaan worshipped many false gods, who were 'dead' by comparison, because they did not exist.

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Joshua then gave a list of the people who would be driven out of Canaan – the Canaanites/Kanaanites/Kěna`aniy, tribes descended from Canaan. Their neighbours were the Ishmaelites, who owned mercantile caravans. Then Hittites/Chittiy are mentioned, descended from the second son of Canaan, Heth'. They used to live in what is now Turkey, but the tribe moved to the Lebanon (north of what became Israel). Then we have the Hivites/Chivviy ('villagers'), also descended from Canaan, son of Ham, who lived north of Canaan. The name 'Hivite' is a Gentile noun.

Next we have the Perizzites/Pěrizziy ('belonging to a village') in the South of Canaan, in the mountains of Judah, but probably originally from the plains. The Girgashites/Girgashiy are then mentioned. They lived to the east of the sea of Galilee. As did the Amorites/'Emoriy, already defeated by Israel. Finally, Joshua mentioned the Jebusites/Yěbuwciy, descended from Jebus and Canaan. They lived in a fortified city on the higher part of what became Jerusalem (Jebus is the old name for Jerusalem) and surrounding mountains. The collective nations mentioned were destroyed by God (also see Deuteronomy 20). They were mainly nomadic and lived in the land already promised to Abraham hundreds of years previously. They 'had to go' or they would pervert the true religion of the Hebrews with their wickedness.

Joshua told the people to observe the Ark being carried in solemn procession to the river. This showed them that "*the Lord of all the earth*" was going before them. He commanded that each tribe should elect just one man each (twelve total). We may assume this was so each tribe had a faithful witness to what was to come, and to readily carry messages from Joshua.

Joshua then prophesied a magnificent miracle – as soon as the priests carrying the Ark stepped into the river, the waters would stop running and pile up on the north side of the priests and following tribes. Almost a re-enactment of what happened at the Red Sea. As far as I am aware, none of the people had witnessed the original Red Sea miracle, but they had heard about it. Now, they would see it for themselves! God is not dead – He is the "living God" Who acts in His world. Believe it or be spiritually sterile.

Verses 14-17

1.

And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people;

2.

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And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,)

3.

That the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho.

4.

And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.

Can you imagine the excitement of this prophecy, to be enacted that very day? The people were all packed up, ready to go, and the priests were at the river bank. The river overflowed at that time of year (harvest), so the priests entered at a shallow spot. The water immediately stopped running and stood like a wall. The river below just dried up, even to the Dead Sea. 'Adam' was the name of a city in the Jordan area very close to the crossing point being used, named Zaretan.

The river bed was dry for the people and priests to cross over directly in sight of Jericho, which was built on a mound in an oasis. It must have taken many hours for all the tribes to cross with their animals and carts, but the river bed remained dry, and the waters did not run until all had passed over. For us, God's promises stand firm always, and if He has promised us, He will bring it about in time. Patience is the key.

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