

CROSSING THE RIVER JORDAN



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MOSES had a wonderful life. Do you remember how God saved him from the river Nile when he was a baby? God knew how well Moses would be able to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, and that is the reason he saved him from being drowned in the river. Then Moses, you remember, lived in the king's palace for forty years. There he received a very good education which helped him when the time came to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

Then he went to the land of Midian where he lived the life of a shepherd, taking care of sheep for his wife's father. At the close of that forty years God spoke to Moses from a burning bush, and asked him to lead the Hebrews out of Egyptian bondage. At that time he was eighty years old. Next there were the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Forty added to eighty makes a hundred and twenty, so now Moses was a hundred and twenty years old!

The time had come when God wanted the Israelites to cross over the river Jordan into the Promised Land, the land that he had promised to Abraham hundreds of years before. But Moses could not enter the Promised Land. He was a faithful servant of God, and God requested him to tell the Israelites that the time had come for them to enter the land, but that a long time afterward they would be driven out of the land again, and scattered all over the earth.

All this has come true, and that's why there are Israelites all over the earth today. That's why Palestine, which is the Promised Land, has not, until now, been owned by the Jewish people, and is the

reason they have not lived there. Isn't it wonderful that the Bible has told us all about this so many hundreds and hundreds of years ago? That is one reason we know that the Bible is the Word of God, and that whatever the Bible says is true. The Bible tells us that the Israelites were to live again in the Promised Land, and we know they will have it for their very own forever.

Before Moses died God permitted him to climb up on a very high mountain called Nebo, and up to one of its highest peaks, called Pisgah. From this height he looked across the river Jordan and saw the wonderful Land of Promise on the other side. Have you ever been up on a high mountain? If you have, you know that you can see very far, and Moses' eyesight was so keen that he could see a very great deal of the good land which God had promised.

Before Moses went up on the high mountain where he died, he appointed a new leader to take his place. This new leader was Joshua. Joshua, you remember, was one of the spies who told Moses and the people forty years before that he believed God would help them conquer the people in the Promised Land if they would only enter and do the best they could.

Yes, Joshua believed God, and that is why God chose him to be Israel's new leader.

But the Israelites could not possibly enter the Promised Land unless the Lord helped them, and I'll tell you why. Between the place where they were camping and the land which God had promised was the river Jordan. This was quite a large river. So far as we know, there were no bridges over it, and no boats or rafts to use in getting across. So you see, the Israelites really needed help! And God helped them cross over this river just as he helped them cross the Red Sea forty years before this when they left Egypt.

God told Joshua to have the priests carry the ark of the covenant down to the edge of the river. The ark of the covenant, you remember, was the only piece of furniture in the most holy room of the tabernacle. Now that the Israelites were about to move, the tabernacle was taken apart and made ready to be carried with them. The priests were to lead the way, and were to carry the ark.

When they reached the very edge of the river and put their feet in the water the priests must have wondered just how they would all cross over. God told Joshua that he would make a path through the river. They would need a lot of faith to really believe that a deep wide river would open up and let them cross through on dry ground, wouldn't they? Yes, indeed! But God is very pleased when we do what he asks us to do, even though it may seem to be very difficult. We know that God will always help us to do whatever he asks. When the feet of the priests who were carrying the ark touched the water, it stopped flowing from up the river. Below where they stood, the water kept on flowing, so it wasn't long before the river bed was drained dry directly in front of them and they were able to cross over. Wasn't that wonderful! It is true, too, because the Bible says so.

But the priests who were carrying the ark didn't cross all the way over—not right away. When they reached the center of the river bed, they stopped and stood there while all the other Israelites crossed over into the Promised Land.

God told Joshua something else to do. He was to select a strong man from each of the twelve tribes of Israel and these were to take a large stone from the middle of the river bed and carry it over to the Promised Land as a memorial of the wonderful miracle God performed for them that day. We would call them souvenirs. Long years after this, when anyone would ask where these stones came from, and what they meant, they were told the wonderful story of how God brought his people safely across the river Jordan into the land of Canaan. Twelve stones were also placed in the center of the river bed where the priests stood while the Israelites were crossing over.

And now, after forty long years of wandering in the wilderness and living in tents, the Israelites were finally in the Promised Land. It was a very fertile land. They found plenty of grain and other things to eat. They didn't need the manna from heaven any more, so it ceased to fall. Now, God was caring for them in other ways.

However, everything was not to be easy for them just because they were in the Promised Land, for there were many strong people living there who did not belong in the land, and they were the enemies of the Israelites. These had to be conquered.



Directly in front of the Israelites as they crossed over the Jordan River was one of the largest cities in the land. It was called Jericho. It was a walled city, being protected by very high walls all around. As soon as the people of Jericho learned how wonderfully the God of the Israelites had helped them to cross over the river Jordan, they were much afraid. They were so afraid that their soldiers did not

come out of the city to fight the Israelites at all. All the people of the city, soldiers and civilians, hurried inside the walls and closed all the gates. They thought that in this way they could save themselves from being captured by the Israelites.

Just about this time, while Joshua was taking a walk and trying to decide how he could capture the city, he looked up, and in front of him stood a man who was dressed like a soldier. Joshua challenged him, asking whether he was a friend or an enemy. And the man answered that he was a friend, that he was the captain of the Lord's army, and that under his leadership the city of Jericho would fall into the hands of the Israelites. As it turned out, this wasn't a man at all, but an angel whom God had sent to tell Joshua how he should capture the city!

God had sent angels to his servants before. You remember that he had sent angels to Abraham and to Moses. And now he had sent an angel to Joshua. Of course we can't really see angels, so when God sends them to speak to his servants they appear as men, and talk as men. This angel—the captain of the Lord's army—gave Joshua a wonderful plan for capturing Jericho.

Again the priests were to carry the ark, and the people were to follow them. They were to march completely around the city once each day for six days. Trumpets were to be blown by those of the priestly tribe, but otherwise they were to do nothing except to walk around the city and return to their places in the camp. It must have seemed very odd to the people of Jericho who were trying to keep away from the Israelites by staying within the walls of the city. They didn't know, of course, just what the Israelites were to do next.

The Israelites marched once around the city each day for six days, and then, as the angel instructed Joshua, on the seventh day they marched around the city seven times. After they had marched around the city seven times on the seventh day, they not only blew their trumpets, but all the Israelites shouted as loudly as they could. And what do you suppose happened? Why, the walls of that city fell down in front of them, and they marched right into the city

and captured it! Certainly God knows how to help his people conquer their enemies!

QUESTIONS

- Who was the leader of the Hebrew people when they entered the Promised Land?
- What body of water did the Hebrews cross in order to enter the Promised Land, and how were they able to cross it?
- What was the name of the first city the Israelites come to in the Promised Land, and how did they conquer it?

Dawn Bible Students Association