

## GOD ENABLES THE ISRAELITES TO CROSS THE RIVER JORDAN

Joshua 3:1-17

Key Verse: 3:8

"Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: `When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.'"

In the last chapter we learned the two spies courageous faith. They crossed the defense line, the River Jordan, and spied out the city of Jericho. At the same time, there was Rahab who lived in the Jericho fortress as a prostitute. Even if she was a prostitute, she had faith that Jehovah God was the Sovereign Ruler of history. Her faith was based on God's work and history happening in her own generation. She said, "I know that the Lord has given this land to you and a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan" (2:10). Because of Rahab's faith, the spies were protected from the scouting enemies and they came back to Joshua and reported. And at the same time, Rahab became the great grandmother of King David, even though she was a gentile woman. She was listed in the genealogy of Christ! It is very funny that a gentile prostitute was included in the genealogy of Jesus. But to God, faith matters most. Racial or ethical problems count as nothing.

First, General Joshua prepares to cross the River Jordan. In today's passage we learn how God enabled the people of Israel to cross the River Jordan after hearing the report of the spies (2:24). In this passage we

learn how it was possible for the people of Israel to cross the River Jordan. The River Jordan was the defense line for the fortress of Jericho, so it was not easy at all. But the people of Israel crossed the River Jordan. How was it possible? Let's see about it.

After hearing the news of the two spies, the next day, early in the morning, General Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. In this way they started to cross the River Jordan. After three days, the officers went throughout the camp, giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God and the priests, who are Levites carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it" (3). The officers said this to let them know how to find the way by following the priests carrying the ark. But here we find a very important thing: That is the ark of the covenant of the Lord. Wherever they went they carried around the ark of the covenant of the Lord. It is because in the ark of the covenant of the Lord were the mercy seat and the Ten Commandments, that is, the word of God. And they believed that when they were with the ark of God, God was present with them. They believed that if God was with them, victory was theirs. They also believed that where there was the ark of God, there was abundant blessing. Once David failed to bring the ark of God to Jerusalem. So he left the ark of God in the house of Obed-Edom. "The ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months, and the Lord blessed him and his entire household" (2Sa 6:11). The officers went throughout the camp and told them, "follow the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it." They said, "You are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then, you will know which way to

go, since you have never been this way before" (3b,4). The officers also said to them, "Keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it." They had an awesome fear and respect for the ark of God, and this was the reason they wanted to keep a distance of a thousand yards. In David's time, Uzzah tried to bring the ark of God to Jerusalem. By accident, he touched the ark of God when the oxen stumbled. Uzzah died on the spot because it was regarded that he had no fear and respect for the ark of God. To the people of Israel, the ark of God was thought to be a symbol of their God. If we read verse 3 again, it explains that they thought the ark of God was the same as God. It says, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God..." This sentence tells us that the ark of God was the same as God himself. As long as they had faith in the ark of God, that is the word of God, they could conquer the promised land and rule over it.

We also need to have a great fear and respect for the word of God. There is a very interesting story about Peter. When Jesus fed the 5000 people with five loaves and two fish, they were greatly impressed. They even intended to make Jesus the king of bread, by force. The next day when Jesus talked about spiritual bread, they insisted on his giving them physical bread, as God had given their fathers bread from heaven. When Jesus continued to explain the efficacy of his blood and flesh they began to scatter, five hundred by five hundred, two hundred by two hundred, village people by village people, couple by couple. Only Peter and Jesus' disciples were left. When all the people left, Jesus asked Peter, "'You do not want to leave too, do you?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'"

(Jn 6:68) Because Peter had the word of God in his heart, despite his many failures, he remained as the top disciple of Jesus to the end. We see another example in St. Paul. In Galatians 2:20 he said, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Paul had the word of God and world mission in his heart. He was anointed by the Risen Jesus as the light for the Gentiles. He had to go around the world to preach the gospel of Jesus. His gospel ministry was not easy. During the time of his Corinthian and Ephesian ministries he had an unbearably difficult time. Ordinary people would take some break or totally give up their mission, but Paul did not give up the world mission command of our Lord Jesus Christ. He said in Acts 19:21, "I must visit Rome also." Paul believed that the word of God saves people, forgives their sins and finally leads them to the kingdom of God, so he did not spare his own life to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. When he was put in prison, he could rarely meet Jewish immigrants to Rome. They made Bible study appointments, but they did not come, so he taught prison guards. Then many prison guards who studied the Bible with Paul became devoted Christians.

Second, God exalts Joshua to be their leader. The people of Israel had fear and respect for the ark of God, that is the word of God. This is the reason why they had confidence to cross the defense line, the River Jordan. When we have confidence in the word of God, nothing is impossible. This is the reason why Paul said, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Php 4:13). How many times have you said, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength"? Those who have not said this even one time must say it twelve times this year and

experience the power of God's word and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. In the spiritual warfare, our only important weapon is the word of God, because the word of God gives God's power in our souls.

Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you" (5). General Joshua knew what to do with the soldiers under him. First and last of all, they have to consecrate their hearts with the word of truth. They should not be complacent or pleasure-seeking. They must be ready to fight the enemy. They must be ready to cross the defense line, the River Jordan. In this way, General Joshua proved that he knows how to obey the word of God. Let's examine why we must consecrate ourselves with the word of God. When Abraham enjoyed his concubine's son, Ishmael, God visited him and told him, "I am God Almighty. Walk before me and be blameless." Then, in Genesis 17:11, God said to Abraham, "You are to undergo circumcision and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you." Abraham had to sanctify himself and his household with circumcision. Jesus also prayed for his disciples, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (Jn 17:17). General Joshua knew that to prepare oneself with the word of God is the best strategy. This would bring success in crossing the River Jordan.

"And the Lord said to Joshua, 'Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses.'"(7) When General Joshua consecrated himself with the word of God and became alert, God recognized his leadership and wanted to let the Israelites know that he is the man after Moses. God also told Joshua to order the priests: "Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the

river" (8). The priests were not likely to listen to General Joshua, but when God ordained him they obeyed. Next, General Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites"(10). General Joshua believed that the word of God would be done as he had said.

Third, crossing the Jordan River. Joshua continued to say, "See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you" (11). He convinced the people that they were not going first, but the word of God goes into the Jordan ahead of them. Joshua said: "As soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap" (13). "Go and stand in the river" is a terrifying command. Everyone knew that the River Jordan was at flood stage. But Joshua said, "Let the priests go there with the ark of God and its water flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap." What a suspenseful story. If it were a movie we could watch it excitingly. But it was reality. It is hard to believe. But General Joshua had faith in God.

How was the people's response? So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the Lord went ahead of them. Here we learn a deep truth. Leaders must have the word of God and they must go ahead of the people. Jesus said in John 10:4b, "He goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him." This is exemplary leadership. Leaders should be good examples and good influences like

Joshua.

"Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah, (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off" (15-16). As their feet touched the stream the water stopped. What a spectacle! So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. There was an apprehensive problem for the priests. The people of Israel were crossing the River Jordan as on dry ground, but the priests might have doubted. "Wow, this huge number of our people are crossing. What will we do if the water divides and falls down on us?" This leaders' worry and agony was weighing down their souls all the time. If anybody is a leader, he experiences this kind of event many times. And he is almost choked. But the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm. We remember General Eisenhower, the commander in chief of the Allied forces during WWII. Many Generals wondered about a certain strategy, especially the Normandy invasion. General Eisenhower decided to cross the English Channel. The waves were threatening, but he ordered them to land on the Normandy beach. Because of his order, soldiers were surprised. At the same time their morale was greatly enhanced. In this way the invincible German fortress was knocked down. But in spite of his leadership, he was gentle and noble. After the war he became President of Harvard University and next, President of the United States.

In this part we learn that a leader must be firm and recognized by his soldiers under his command. It is easy for us to see how to

be firm when we see the example of Moses. Moses was in a great crisis when he and his people were near the Red Sea. The Egyptian army which was comparable to the army of the United States was chasing after the Israelites making a thunderous sound by driving their iron chariots. The Israelites could not advance because the Red Sea was billowing wild. But Moses had faith that God Almighty would save them. He raised his staff and prayed to God, "Lord, be with us." Then the Red Sea was divided into two and waters on both sides stood like a big pillow. When Moses was firm in God Almighty, God was with them and enabled them to cross the Red Sea as on dry land (Heb 11:29). Now General Joshua had to be firm in God Almighty. It was the time for General Joshua to cross the Jordan River, which was known as the first defense line for the fortress of Jericho. It was the time for Joshua to be firm and cross the Jordan River. General Joshua's battle plan is our very own. May God give you firm faith in God Almighty, who is the Sovereign Ruler of human history.