

Joshua 3; 4; 5:10-12

Aim of Lesson

To show how the powerful God of Israel was with his people as they prepared to conquer Canaan.

Background study

Exodus 14:15-31; 19:10-11; Numbers 4:5-6; Deuteronomy 18:21-22.

Suggested outline of lesson

Remind the children that the Israelites had come to the end of their long journey and they had only to cross the River Jordan in order to set foot in the promised land. But they could not wade or swim across because the river was in flood from melting snow; neither were there any of the usual means for crossing a river. (Discuss with the class what these might be, e.g. bridge, tunnel, boats). What were they to do? The class may remember that God's people had faced a similar problem shortly after leaving Egypt. Of those now waiting to cross the Jordan, some would remember the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, and everyone had certainly heard about it.

While the Israelites were encamped on the east bank, Joshua gave instructions that they should prepare themselves both physically and mentally; for they were to witness the power of God working for them. This would involve washing their clothes and joining in prayers, to remind them that they were holy and special people. As he had done on many other occasions, God gave precise commands which were to be followed in detail. He also assured Joshua that not only was he with him, but that the forthcoming events would firmly establish him as leader in the eyes of the people.

From early morning there would have been an atmosphere of excitement and expectancy in the camp. Every family had packed their belongings and were ready to move as soon as the signal was given. Eagerly they watched and waited for the procession of priests carrying the beautifully-covered ark of the covenant. This sight would also serve to underline their awareness of being a people ruled and guided by God. The distance of several hundred metres which was to be maintained between the procession and those following it would further remind them of the sacredness of the ark, and heighten their feelings of reverence and awe.

When Joshua explained to the people what was about to happen, he used the occasion to stress the certainty of God's promises. When they saw this miracle come to pass, as promised, they would be reassured that God's other promises concerning their occupation of the land would also be fulfilled.

In describing the remarkable stopping of the flowing river, point out the absolute faith of the priests in setting foot on the edge of the water and their endurance at having to stand holding the ark while the many thousands of people, with their goods, flocks and herds, passed safely across the dried-up bed.

There remained two things to do before the priests also passed over to the west bank. Twelve strong men were chosen (one from each tribe) and given the honour and duty of collecting one large boulder each from the river bed where the priests were standing. These stones were then carried to the place where they were to camp that night, and were to be set up as a permanent memorial, which would be a witness to future generations to the truth of the miracle. In addition to this, Joshua also raised up a memorial on the river bed itself - a mound of twelve stones.

Discuss with the children the feelings of the people who participated in this awe-inspiring event and now found themselves in the rich land for which they had longed. Their desert wanderings were at an end. The passover was celebrated, after which they fed on the produce of the land. The manna which had sustained them daily for forty years was no longer required and did not appear again. This people, who had been saddened by the death of their wise leader, Moses, now turned in confidence and great respect to Joshua, recognizing that the authority of God rested with him.

The lesson could be concluded by reading together the last four verses of Joshua 4, which constitute an appeal for the people never to forget the power which they had witnessed, and their responsibility towards their God.

Relevance to the children's lives

God promised Joshua that the river would dry up, so that the Israelites could cross. The people saw that God kept his promise. How do you think this made them feel about other promises which God made? We learn in Sunday School about God's promises which have already come true. Many others have not yet come true. How sure can we be that everything God has said will take place, will actually happen?

Worksheets

The dot-to-dot reads 'Follow God's instructions'. The stone puzzle reads 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground because God dried up the river. He did this so that everyone might know that the Lord is powerful!'

Prayer

Dear Lord God, Joshua, the priests and the people in today's story believed in you and you helped them. Help us to trust in you as they did. Amen.

Memory verse

"On that day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him, as they had stood in awe of Moses, all the days of his life" (Joshua 4:14).