

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, open our hearts and our minds to Your love and Your justice. Then, when we come across wickedness and prejudice within the world, may we draw on the guidance and strength of Your Spirit to bring hope and love to those who are oppressed. May Your Kingdom come, Lord Jesus, and may we live in its light. AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Barak Obama

*For the first time I suggest that we pray for an individual during this week. Whatever we think of the USA or Barak Obama, his decisions will affect everyone; so pray for him.*

### On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the skill of pilots and the safety of travel by air.
- Pray about the difficult relationship between money and sport
- Pray that politicians will consult to help people, not just compete

## Meditation

In the Kingdom of God there will be peace.

Peace to think;

to dwell on what is good and right and true  
and not be oppressed by temptation.

Peace to love;

to offer ourselves in unrestrained affection  
and not fear rejection from anyone.

Peace to see;

to open our eyes to the beauty all around us  
and not be influenced by fashion and publicity.

Peace to listen;

to hear what is said and enjoy music's breadth  
and not be subjected to the noise of the world.

In the Kingdom of God there will be peace, and so much more.

## Bible Study - Joshua 3:1-6

<sup>1</sup> Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and arrived at the Jordan, where they encamped before crossing over. <sup>2</sup> After three days the officers went throughout the camp, <sup>3</sup> giving instructions to the people: 'When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God carried by the Levitical priests, you must set off from your positions and follow it. <sup>4</sup> Be sure to keep a distance of about a thousand yards (two thousand cubits) from the ark, do not go near it. Then you will know the way to go, since you have not been this way before.' <sup>5</sup> Joshua said to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.' <sup>6</sup> Then Joshua told the priests, 'Lift up the ark of the covenant and move on in front of the people.' So they took it up and went ahead of them.

## Review

In this passage of scripture we can sense the people of Israel's great sense of excitement as Joshua made the final preparations before entry into the Promised Land. The story emphasises the commands of Joshua, acting as Moses had done before, with confidence and authority. It also emphasises the symbolism of crossing of the Jordan, with the word for 'crossing' being used far more times in Hebrew than any English translation would suggest. The movement of the entire camp took three days (see verse 2), and the detailed instructions added to the sense of anticipation. Then, on the day before the entry, Joshua's officers gave the final instructions to the people and Joshua declared 'tomorrow, the Lord will do amazing things among you!' (3:5). Who would have slept that night?

**Being prepared for a great event** In the description of the great events of the Old Testament, we are told that everything was done very carefully. Jacob prepared assiduously before crossing the Jabbok and facing Esau on his way home to Canaan (Gen 32); and the details given to Moses about leaving the land of Egypt were precise (Ex 12f.), as were his instructions before they received the Law at Mount Sinai (Ex 19,20). Later in Israel's history, David followed the Lord's careful plan before accepting the Kingship of all Israel and Judah (2 Samuel 1-5), and the people who returned from Babylonian exile followed a careful spiritual pathway set out by Ezra as they approached Jerusalem (Ezra 8,9). In each case, the details had significance, as they do in our story today.

The crossing of the Jordan was symbolic of entry into the Promised Land of Canaan, and it was not part of a battle (as in the crossing of the Red Sea), and there was no enemy to attack them immediately they crossed. This crossing would be an act of purely spiritual significance, marking the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham, when he had surveyed the land after separating from Lot (Gen 13). The Lord had said to Abraham 'rise up and walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.' (Gen 13:17). Shortly after, God confirmed the promise (Gen 15:17-19) and said that the land would not be occupied for many generations (Gen 15:16). Now was the time for this promise to be fulfilled, the great covenant between God and His people that defined their relationship and had already been confirmed through the giving of the Law (Exodus 19:5, 24:7,8). Nearly all of Israel's history since then has been linked in some way to the story of the 'Promised Land'.

**God first** The instructions given to the people were all about keeping themselves separate from their 'holy' God, ready for the great crossing. The officers commanded that two thousand cubits (in Hebrew), roughly a thousand yards, should be kept between the people and the Ark of the Covenant. We can find little significance in this distance, however, it is clear from previous instructions (Numbers 1-4, and see the 'positions' mentioned, 3:3) that the entire company of Israel and the Levitical groups accompanying the Ark and the Tabernacle was of considerable size, more than half a million people in all. It is not surprising that the distance separating the ark from the people was large; but the spiritual significance of this was more important than the measurement. God was their leader, not Joshua or any other leader, so in the manner of the day, the Ark went 'in front of the people' (3:6). From the human point of view it was vulnerable to attack, and yet spiritually, it declared Israel's total confidence in their God as they entered the land.

**The importance of following** The officers told the people that they had to follow the Ark because they 'had not been that way before'. Again, we must accept this as spiritual not practical advice, and as the people came into their inheritance, a principle was established that the Lord God showed the way, and it was not up to the people or their leaders to thrust ahead. All must follow the Lord. It is not relevant for us to ask about how the Levites knew where to go; scripture does not tell us about any other arrangements between Joshua and

the Lord, we are only told about the instructions for the people. It seems simple enough to be required to follow and not to rush on ahead, but it is probably one of the most difficult of things for most of us to do!

Joshua promised that the next day, God would do wonders! I wonder if anyone said 'Why not today?' as we might? When important things happen of great significance for God's people either individual or collectively, it is more important than ever for us to demonstrate by our public and visible actions that the Lord is our leader and we, His people, are the followers.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. When great and important things have happened in the life of your church, how have people prepared spiritually?
2. In what ways do we demonstrate to the world that Jesus is our leader and we are His followers?
3. How do we 'consecrate' ourselves today, and make ourselves 'holy' and ready to do the holy things God requires of us?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*The idea of God's people as followers is something that is not strong in the Old Testament, and if we had to pick any scripture to follow this theme, we would probably do it from the New Testament. This incident does graphically demonstrate the importance of allowing the Lord God to direct our ways, for what we do is His work and our service is to do His will. All too often we give the impression of people who have our own agenda related to our own circumstances and opinions, but we have to illustrate more than this!*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *What important circumstances lie ahead of you? How are they important from a spiritual perspective? Take time to seek the Lord's advice about what happens and how to face this, and expect Him to lead you, not for you to just go ahead and presume God will give you affirmation afterwards. It may be that you do not need to change your way of approaching such tasks, but perhaps you do?*
- *Pray for all those you know who face major and life changing situations. Ask the Lord to lead them through what lies ahead.*

## Final Prayer

Lord God Almighty, You have given us the greatest of gifts; You have given us life and You have saved us. Accept the worship and service of our lives, as we take part in all You have provided for us to do this day. Revive our souls for all that lies ahead of us we pray: AMEN