

Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day. (Joshua 4:9)

Almighty and everlasting God, you have promised to never leave us nor forsake us. Through the waters of baptism, you have redeemed us, called us by name, and claimed us as your own. In times of trial and uncertainty, help us not to fear. Thank you for your constant, unchanging love. We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Introduction

After the death of Moses, God chose Joshua to be the new leader of his people and to lead them into the Promised Land. The Jordan River served as a boundary splitting the land of Canaan into east and west halves. Crossing this river marked the end of the Israelites' wilderness wanderings.

Read: Joshua 3:1-17

On reading these verses, what are some of your initial impressions and questions? What stands out to you?

The Biblical Context

In this session, begins a new section of the Old Testament, the books of **History**. These take us through the period of Joshua and the Conquest, through the time of the Judges, and into the days of the Monarchy.

The Book of Joshua tells what happened when the Israelites first entered into the Promised Land. This period is known as the Conquest, when God led the people to many victories over the tribes of Canaan.

Though the people of Israel ultimately gained control of the general region, they never completely defeated the people of the land. This set them up for years of influence and competition from the pagan religions that were practiced by the Canaanite peoples.

Discussion Questions

1. Who had God chosen to be the new leader after Moses? Why did God want the people to know that he was still with them, even though Moses was gone?
2. According to verse 3:12, how many tribes of people were there among the Israelites? These tribes were named after the sons of Jacob. Can you list them?
3. The Ark of the Covenant was a box carried on poles (Exodus 25:10-22). What was so special about this box? What did it have inside? Why was this artifact so important to the Israelites?
4. What happened when the priests came to the edge of the Jordan River? When had something similar happened to the Israelites before? How do these two events serve as "bookends" for the larger story?
5. Why did Joshua have the chosen men make a heap of rocks? What were the people told to remember about these stones? How would this memorial help the faith of future generations?
6. In the New Testament, John the Baptist's ministry took place very near this same spot at the Jordan. In what sense did John declare to the people of his day that "the living God is among you" (Joshua 3:10)? To whom did he point the people?
6. Read Isaiah 43:1-3. In what way do the prophet's words here relate to the story of Joshua? Do you believe that God is with you in the things you face, or does God seem indifferent to your struggles?
7. In many old American spiritual hymns, the image of "crossing the Jordan" is used as a metaphor for death. Why do you think that is? How does it illustrate difference between this life and the next?