

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF JOSHUA PART TWO – CHAPTERS TWO TO FIVE – CROSSING THE RIVER

Moses had prepared the way for Joshua and God had confirmed His call to Joshua. God's people responded with enthusiasm. The stage was set for an exciting ministry. The plan was simple. All Joshua had to do to lead the people into possessing all God had promised them, was to encourage them to put the soles of their feet on their new land.(1:3) But two major obstacles stood in the way of them even getting started, the River Jordan and the city of Jericho.

Joshua was concerned that the Israelites would not be asked to walk blind into a difficult situation so he sent two spies to check out Jericho and the land, and to report back. He would have remembered how he and Caleb with ten others had been sent to do the same thing 38 years before.(Num.13) He presumably checked carefully how confident his two spies were in God's faithfulness before he sent them. God does not usually call us to plunge into the Christian life without first being well informed by teaching from those who have already been there. The spies were not well disguised because the king of Jericho soon got word of their presence in his city and ordered a search for them. The Devil is well informed about our witness as Christians and will be out to trap us. Their choice of a base in Jericho is surprising, the house of a harlot called Rahab. Couldn't they have chosen a place which was a bit more respectable? Jesus was so often welcomed by tax-collectors and sinners rather than the religious.(Matt.9:10-13) Jesus came for sinners. Rahab would eventually marry an Israelite, Salmon, and together they would produce Boaz, who married Ruth, who in turn after 3 more generations would lead to David, and many more generations later, Jesus.(Matt.1:5-16) What a marvelous example of grace! Rahab hid the spies, misled their enemies and sent them on their way, after receiving a promise of salvation for her and her family.(2)

Joshua and the people of Israel were greatly encouraged by this clear evidence that God had planned their future and set out at once to face obstacle number one, the River Jordan. The priests were to go first with the ark of the covenant, the box containing the summary of the word of God which always leads the way for us. The people were to consecrate themselves, be prepared in their own hearts, and follow at a distance of one kilometre. The priests were instructed to stand just into the Jordan at which point the river dried up. As priests of God we are to show others the way. They then moved to the middle of the river and stayed there while possibly as many as two million people tramped past them. One day in the future Jesus would go down into the Jordan and come up again.(Matt.3:13-17) The New Testament explained this as foreshadowing His death and resurrection.(Lk.12:50; Rom.6:3-6) We are commanded to follow Him to the cross and up again in new life, by dying with Him at the cross to our self-run lives and receiving His resurrection life.(3)

Before the priest and the ark left the river bed the Lord told Joshua to do two strange things. First they were to collect 12 large stones, one for each tribe, from the middle of the river and pile them as a heap on the bank. Then they were to carry 12 different stones, from the bank they were leaving behind to the middle of the river and leave them there.

For generations to come this would illustrate the exchange which takes place at the cross and be a teaching aid for fathers to instruct their children. Our sin is buried beneath the river with Jesus at the cross. He was raised up to become the foundation stone of our lives.(Eph.2:20) Future generation were not to go diving in the Jordan to search for the buried 12 stones as we are not to go back in life searching for forgiven sins.(4)

Gilgal would not only be remembered for the pile of stones, a reminder of an exchanged life. It was also the scene of mass circumcision. God's command to Moses that every male should be circumcised had been neglected as they wandered often aimlessly in the wilderness. Circumcision represented an old life discarded, a principle the previous generation had forgotten. Similarly celebrating the Passover had been overlooked since the hurried meal in Egypt on the night before they left.(Exod.12,13) Now for the first time they enjoyed what had been promised them in Egypt, the good food of Canaan, as they gathered what was around them. That day the manna from heaven ceased. There was to be no going back. Their diet was going to be much more interesting and varied in the future as we are to feed on all that is available to us in Christ.

Joshua stood looking at Jericho, their next great challenge, wondering how on earth they were to defeat such a powerful city with its thick, high walls and well armed defenders. Suddenly there was an armed man in front of him. Whose side was he on? Was he one of Joshua's men or perhaps a soldier from Jericho checking out the invaders? Joshua challenged him, 'Are you for us or for our adversaries?' and received a puzzling answer, 'No...'. The man then goes on to explain that he is captain of the host of the Lord. He has not come to help Joshua but to take over. Joshua is invited to join him not the other way round. Joshua gets the point and falls to the ground in worship, calling the mysterious stranger, Lord. He is instructed to take off his sandals because this is holy ground, just as Moses was ordered to when he met the same Lord at the burning bush.(Exod.3:5) Having learned this vital lesson that victory over the enemy does not result from our best and bravest efforts supported by God, but that it is entirely God's work, we can join Him if we wish.(5)

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. When did Jesus also accept service from a harlot?(Lk.7:36-50) What was the response from respectable people when He did? What can we learn from this story about how God sees and accept sinners and how we should?(2)
2. How is the story of crossing the Jordan similar to other Old Testament stories involving water? How does it foreshadow baptism in the New Testament? Why were people not baptized in the Old Testament?(3)
3. How did the exchange of stones from the bank of the river to the middle illustrate what Christ has done for us? In what way does Romans 1:23,25,26 show why this exchange was needed? How does Romans 6 reverse those exchanges? How has the exchange of stones happened in your own experience?(4)
4. Why are Christians not circumcised? What New Testament picture has replaced it? How can we collect manna today?(Jn.6:41-51) When do we make the same mistake Joshua made with the captain of the Lord's army?(5)