

YOU HAVE NOT PASSED THIS WAY BEFORE.

JOSHUA 3:1-5;

1 “And Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over.

2 And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host;

3 And they commanded the people, saying, when ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it.

4 Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore.

5 And Joshua said unto the people, sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.”

What do we know about Shittim and its significance in the history of the children of Israel? The Biblical meaning of Shittim is (THORNE.) Shittim was the last place that the Israelites camped on their journey from Egypt to the promised land. It was the scene of the final events before crossing over the Jordan River. At Shittim the Israelites fell into error, because many of them took wives from among the Moabites. (Numbers 25:1) Interracial marriages were forbidden by God. There punishment was a plague in which four thousand died because of idolatry and interracial marriages. (Numbers 25:9) It was there, a census was taken of those twenty years old and over. (Numbers 26:2)

At Shittim Moses learned that he would not enter the Promised Land and Joshua would be his successor. From Schittim Moses was able to see the Promised Land and Joshua was anointed to succeed him. (Numbers 27:13-23) The Israelites successfully defeated the Midianites

during their encampment there. The tribes of Ruben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh received their inheritance, but they continued with the nine and a half tribes until they received their inheritance. Moses delivered his farewell address there, just before his death. It was from Shittim that Joshua sent two spies to scout the city of Jericho. (Joshua 2:1.) It was an important place in the history of the Israelites. The last place they camped before they entered into Canaan, the land that God promised to their forefathers to be their inheritance.

The prophet Micah refers to what happened from Shittim to Gilgal (Micah 6:5) evidently reminding the Israelites of the grace of God revealed in the crossing of the Jordan River. Joel spoke of the fountain which will water the valley of Shittim. (Joel 3:18) This is what it says; “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD and shall water the valley of Shittim.” His prophecy may be representative of the dry wilderness which he envisioned as being transformed. That wilderness is a representation of the millions who have not yet received the refreshing outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

It was then time for Israelites to leave Shittim, it was not their destination, it was one of the many places where they camped along their journey to the promised land. They moved towards Jordan and camped there for three days. The people were commanded to go, after the ark of the covenant, which was carried by the priest and the Levites, the ark of the covenant represented the presence of the LORD. They were to follow from a distance so that they would know the way they should go; “BECAUSE THEY HAD NOT PASSED THAT WAY BEFORE.” Following from a distance also represented reverence. It signified that God is not ordinary and should not be associated or treated commonly. Keeping a distance would also allow His light to shine in the path that they should go, because they had never passed that way

before.

Formerly the ark was carried in the midst of them; but there was a change.

The ark of the covenant of their God would be carried in front of the people at a distance to show them the way; because they had never passed that way before.

Joshua 3 verse five says, “And Joshua said unto the people, sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.”

How can we apply what we learn from this passage to our lives today?

1. SHITTIM was the last place where the Israelites camped on their journey to the promised land before they crossed over the Jordan River. We are on the threshold of crossing over into 2023. We are still in our Shittim, 2022.

Were there some thorns that we encountered in 2022? The Israelites fell into the errors of inter rational marriages and idolatry. Have you fallen into error during 2022? Have you placed anything or anyone in place of God. Have you allowed your job, business with various activities to take the place of God in your life?

What about your leisure time, are you allowing that to rob you of time that you should be spending in God’s presence? Anything that we place ahead of God in our lives is an idol. The punishment for the Israelites was a plague that killed four thousand. We are now under grace, as a result we are not destroyed, but given time to repent. They were able to defeat the Midianites.

Were there some victories over the enemy this year? Joshua was chosen as their next leader while they were in Shittim. Is there an assignment that God has given you this year which is leading you towards your purpose? Perhaps new responsibilities?

2. The Israelites were told to go after the ark of the covenant which was carried by the priest and Levites. To the Israelites, the ark of the covenant represented the presence of the Lord which would enable them to see the way they were going, because they had not passed that way

before. They were to follow the priests and Levites as long as they were carrying the ark of the covenant of their God; and we should follow our ministers as they follow God in sound doctrine.

As we prepare ourselves to enter into the New Year, we need to be guided by God's presence. 2023 will be a path that we have never traveled before. We need to go after God, by seeking Him to lead us, to show us the way. They were told that they should not go near to the ark of the covenant. We are encouraged to draw near to God and He will draw near to us, and we are invited to go to Him boldly with confidence, and we will find His grace in our times of need. Although we have not passed this way before, there is no need for fear, as long as we follow the Lord our God.

3. Before they could cross the Jordan River and enter into the Promised Land, they were commanded to sanctify themselves; because tomorrow the Lord was going to do wonders among them. At Shittim, they erred. They needed to repent and let go of idolatry. There may be errors we made in 2022 that led us into Spiritual adultery or idolatry. We need to sanctify ourselves, let go, get rid of anything that would rob us from receiving the fullness of God's richest blessings in 2023. Notice that the priest did not sanctify the people. No, they were told to sanctify themselves.

In other words, each person should examine him or herself and seek forgiveness, repent of any sin, and seek the Lord. We should be set apart from the things of the flesh which oppose the things of the Spirit. Then we will be ready to cross over into the promises of 2023 as the Lord leads us.

4. Sanctifying ourselves does not guarantee us that there will not be any enemies in 2023. The Israelites had the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, the tricky Gibeonites, and all the other ites, waiting for them, but they defeated all of them. We too will face enemies after we cross over into 2023 and we will be able to defeat our enemies if we allow the Holy Spirit to show us the way in

2023, because the battle is not ours, but the Lord's. We have not passed this way before, but He knows the way, He created the way, in fact He is the Way. Follow Him, go after Him in 2023.

He is going to do wonders in us and through us in 2023. AMEN.

BENEDICTION: "The LORD bless thee, and keep thee:

25 The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:

26 The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace."