

CHAPTER 3, VERSES 16-17

by Rabbi Dovid Siegel

(3, 16)

"And the descending water halted and stood in one heap very far from Adam, the city alongside Tzarsan. And the waters descending to the Dead Sea, the Sea of the plains ended and were cut off and the people crossed facing Yericho." As we will learn, the city of Yericho was the Jewish people's first city of conquest. The Scriptures accentuate the Jewish nation's proximity to Yericho as a significant factor in their crossing the Jordan. In fact, the Scriptures insert this point in the midst of their description of the crossing even before telling of the entire nation's crossing the Jordan.

It may be suggested that this particular detail served as a major source of inspiration for the Jewish nation. When carefully examining the text, we discover the words *"facing Yericho"* being used rather than *"near Yericho."* This implies that the Jewish people's sight was set on Yericho throughout their crossing of the Jordan. As they were taking their first steps into Eretz Yisroel, their eyes were focused on capturing Yericho. This accomplished two important things for the Jewish people. Firstly, it impressed upon them the absolute necessity of conquering the land. They couldn't treat the crossing of the Jordan as a momentous entry into the Promised Land. That feeling of possession would be postponed for the next seven years. Their view of crossing the Jordan was totally focused on conquest, with Yericho being the first step in this process.

Yet a second message was conveyed via crossing while facing Yericho specifically. Remember that the Jewish people obtained secret information regarding the inhabitants of Yericho. Rachav had previously revealed to the spies the petrified state of the entire city. Thus, with the opening of the Jordan directly in front of Yericho, it felt as if the road into the city was wide open. All that remained to be done was to march up to the walled city, and it too would open up for them. With this newly gained confidence they were able to envision all their subsequent conquests in this same manner. In essence, we now realize that facing Yericho was an integral part of the crossing. It put things in perspective, serving as an inspiration to them for the conquests of Yericho and all subsequent ones.

(3, 17)

"And the Kohanim who carried the ark of Hashem's covenant stood, prepared, in dry land in the midst of the Jordan and all Israel are passing in dry land until the entire nation completely passed." There is a peculiar change in this passage from the past to the present tense. The passage should have read, *"And the Kohanim stood in the midst of the Jordan until the entire nation passed."* Instead it reads, *"And*

the Kohanim stood there and all Israel 'are passing'" in the present tense.

In answer to this we can suggest the following interpretation. The passage is conveying a relationship between the stance of the Kohanim and the crossing of the Jewish people. The change of tense here reveals that the Jewish people's crossing was the direct result of the ark carried by the Kohanim positioned in the Jordan. The passage relates that it was the ark's presence that initially split the water and it was this very same presence that maintained the split. We can therefore interpret the passage in the following manner. The Kohanim stood in the midst of the Jordan so that the Jewish people can be crossing it. The passage is written in present tense to signify that it is not an historical account, but rather it is a link between the Kohanim and the crossing by the Jewish people. The passage then continues and concludes with an historical account that the Kohanim remained in their position until the entire Jewish nation completed their crossing of the Jordan.

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Kollel Toras Chesed of Skokie

3732 West Dempster

Skokie, Illinois 60076

Phone: 847-674-7959 Fax: 847-674-4023

E-mail: kollel@arlin.net
