



CROSSING THE JORDAN

Joshua 3:1–5:12

It's not necessarily the most talented or brilliant people God uses; it's those who humbly examine themselves, confess their sins, and walk in holiness and faith. The preparation of Israel for the conquest of Canaan serves as an apt example of this important principle.

We now come in our journey to Joshua chapter 3. Here we find the people of Israel camping beside the Jordan River, preparing to enter the land of Canaan.

You might expect Joshua to tell the people to sharpen their swords, but instead, he says here in verse 5, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you." Old Testament consecration could include washing their clothes and taking a bath, but it symbolized self-examination and confession of sin.

The principle here is timeless: maybe the reason we don't see God's power as much as we could is because

we aren't consecrated, pure vessels. God doesn't need clever people; He wants clean people.

Now as the Jordan River flows from the Sea of Galilee all the way down to the Dead Sea, it descends several hundred feet, producing a natural current. During the flood season in the spring, it overflows its banks up to a mile wide—and it's now spring.

So, the Israelites aren't camping out by a little stream of water; they're next to a wide, rushing river. Most of these people had not seen God part the waters of the Red Sea forty years earlier in Egypt, and I'm sure they're wondering how God is going to get them across the Jordan River.

Joshua then speaks to the nation:

"Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites . . . When the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the wa-



Procession of priests from Medinet Habu



ters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap.” (verses 10, 13)

The priests are carrying the ark of the covenant, a gold-covered box about two feet by four feet, containing the rod of Aaron, a jar of manna, and the stone tablets of the law. The ark, you notice, is leading the way.

Note also that God promised to stop the rushing current of the Jordan River only *after* the feet of the priests step into the water. These priests are probably praying, “Lord, if you don’t do something miraculous, we’re sunk—literally!”

Verse 15-17 describe what happens next:

As soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water . . . the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away . . . and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan.

It’s as if an invisible hand has stopped the water from flowing downriver. A mountain of water starts piling up, higher and higher and higher, creating a dry path below it for the people of Israel to walk across.

Now so-called scholars have to dance all around this miraculous event in order to deny it. But they have a lot of trouble doing that because the Bible is so clear.

1. This took place when the Jordan was at flood stage—a rushing river (verse 15).

2. The waters were stopped with perfect timing—right when the priests’ feet touched the water’s edge (verse 16).
3. The wall of water was held in place while the entire nation crossed (verse 17).
4. The soft river bottom immediately became dry (verse 17).
5. The waters returned as soon as Israel crossed the Jordan (4:18).

There is no reason to doubt this literal event, where God performed an amazing act of divine power.

By the way, the Jordan River literally becomes the first step as Israel begins their public journey into the promised land. Likewise, it’s in the Jordan River that Jesus will be baptized, marking the first step in His public ministry, which completes the plan of salvation so that we can all one day enter the promised land of heaven.

Now this miracle here at the Jordan River not only encourages Israel; it also warns the Canaanite nations to throw down their arms and pursue peace with the true and living God. This, of course, they will refuse to do.

In chapter 4, Joshua commands that twelve stones be taken from the middle of the Jordan River and brought to the other side. They will be used to create a national memorial, a permanent reminder of God’s provision.

God knows one of our greatest enemies is a bad spiritual memory. We question God’s presence because we forget what He has done in the past. So, Joshua says in verses 21-23:

“When your children ask their fathers in times to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.’ . . . as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over.”



You ought to keep a mental trophy case for memories of God’s provision. When my wife and I were first married and I began my seminary training, we were as poor as church mice. One month we simply didn’t have the money to pay the next month’s rent. Our landlord was a believer, and the day before our rent was due, he called us on the telephone to tell us that God was impressing on his heart to not charge us rent for that coming month. Let me tell you, for us that was like crossing the Jordan River.

What are your children and grandchildren hearing from you, by the way? Do you have a trophy case of memories of God’s faithfulness?

You would think the Israelites would move forward with an attack on Jericho. But instead, two events here in Joshua chapter 5 will slow them down.

First, Joshua reinstates the covenant practice of circumcision. In the first nine verses, we read that all the men of Israel are circumcised—this was the symbol of Israel’s covenant relationship with God. They had grown up for forty years, following their disobedient parents around the wilderness, and none of them had been circumcised.

Verse 8 tells us that “they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed.” Here they are, poised to attack Jericho, and God effectively says, “Not so fast; that might be the right military move, but it’s not the right spiritual move.” God is more interested in your relationship *with* Him than one more accomplishment *for* Him. We often get carried away with our accomplishments, when God desires a relationship.

The second delay we find in verse 10: “They kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho.” Passover is the remembrance of the nation’s deliverance from Egypt following the tenth and final plague. They would kill, roast, and eat a lamb and remember the grace of God in their lives.

Now if there were spies from the city of Jericho watching them, they must have run back to tell the

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strange news that Israel is out there having some kind of national barbecue. Of course, it is far more than that. God wants Israel to remember His power over Egypt before they experience His power over Jericho. And the battle of Jericho is just ahead.

What big decision with even bigger implications are you facing? Some pondering on the riverbanks is wise, but why do we believers sometimes hesitate to act when God has already promised His presence and His provision? How is the priests’ example helpful in your case?

What are some of the typical ways Satan tempts you to measure your relationship with God by your *doing for* God rather than being with God? What choice does Joshua make in order to keep the nation in proper balance? In what ways is obedience to God’s word a shield against Satan’s temptations?

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