

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Joshua - Lesson 2 - Chps. 2 & 3

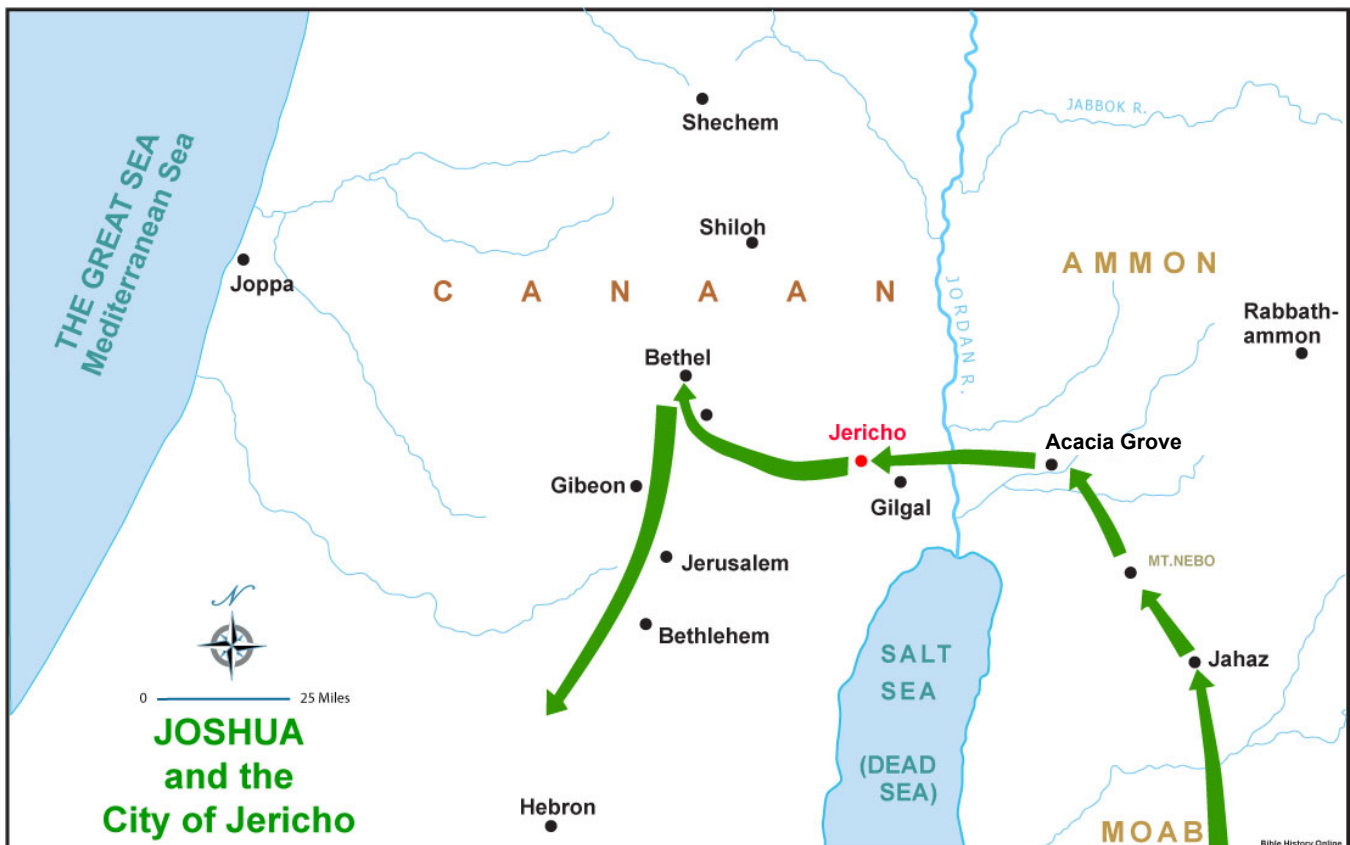
Joshua Chapter 2

To set the scene for today's chapter, the children of Israel were camped near the eastern side of the Jordan River, ready to claim the Promised Land for their own. Forty years of wandering in the wilderness were over. Most of the people that had crossed the Red Sea had died, and now the younger generation (those who were under twenty years of age when they left Egypt and those who were born in the wilderness) was ready to claim the land of Canaan. This land had been promised to the ancestors of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but it would not be taken without a fight. The same God that gave them the land promised them that He would go before them across the Jordan River.

Before he died, Moses told the people:

Deuteronomy 31:3 (NLT) But the Lord your God himself will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy the nations living there, and you will take possession of their land. Joshua will lead you across the river, just as the Lord promised. . . **6** So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the Lord your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you."

7 Then Moses called for Joshua, and as all Israel watched, he said to him, "Be strong and courageous! For you will lead these people into the land that the Lord swore to their ancestors he would give them. You are the one who will divide it among them as their grants of land. **8** Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you."



In today's lesson we are introduced to a Gentile woman - a woman of Jericho - who will become a part of the nation of Israel. She will be rescued from Jericho and marry an Israelite man, and will actually be named in the family tree of the Lord Jesus Christ! Her name is Rahab, and she was called a harlot. But even with her questionable background, she proved to be a woman of great faith. The New Testament says of Rahab:

Hebrews 11:30 It was by faith that the people of Israel marched around Jericho for seven days, and the walls came crashing down.

31 It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God. For she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

Rahab is listed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew's first chapter:

Matthew 1:5 Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab).

Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth).

Obed was the father of Jesse. **6** Jesse was the father of King David . . .

Joshua Chapter 2

Joshua 2:1 (NKJV) Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho."

The children of Israel had been at this crossroads before. After God brought them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and after He gave them the Law at Mount Sinai and led them to the edge of the Promised Land at Kadesh-barnea, Moses sent out twelve spies.

The men went on a scouting party lasting forty days. Upon their return, ten of the men gave a bad report. Only Joshua and Caleb spoke words of faith - that they could conquer the land (Numbers 13:27-33).

The whole community believed the bad report and said terrible things. They said they would all die in battle and that they should return to Egypt - and choose a new leader instead of Moses (Numbers 14:1-4).

It was one of the worst moments in the history of Israel. God's people acted in unbelief and ingratitude instead of faith. They were in big trouble. Moses and Aaron fell on their faces and interceded for them (which saved lives), but those age twenty and older would die in the wilderness. They would wander in the desert for forty years, waiting for the older, unbelieving generation to die off.

After forty years, that generation died off, and now their children and grandchildren were getting ready to enter the promised land. We see Joshua (who was one of those twelve spies) sending out spies once again, but this time it is only two spies - and their trip will last only three days, not forty.

Why did Joshua send out spies at all? There is a practical side to the work of God. Yes, God promised them the land, but Joshua still had to go about the business of conquering it. He needed some information to help him go about it. Therefore, he sent out the spies. He didn't need to know *if* he could conquer it, he needed information so he could best go about the business of conquering it. So

these two spies went out to study Jericho and its surrounding area. Joshua sent out men he could trust, and they were to report back to him only.

Joshua 2:1 . . . So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there.

2 And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men have come here tonight from the children of Israel to search out the country."

3 So the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the country."

4 Then the woman took the two men and hid them. So she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. **5** And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them." **6** (But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof.) **7** Then the men pursued them by the road to the Jordan, to the fords. And as soon as those who pursued them had gone out, they shut the gate.

Much has been said about Rahab's disreputable occupation. Yes, she was a harlot - a prostitute. She lived in a pagan society in Jericho, where this was an acceptable occupation. God had given his law to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. In God's law we read about the value of life and property. We read that God puts limits on sexuality. But Rahab was not a part of Israelite society. She was part of a heathen society. However, there was something in Rahab that was very great.

Rahab told a big fat lie. Yes, the law of God says that we should tell the truth; but, again, Rahab was part of a heathen society where the ends justify the means. But even so, there was something in Rahab that was very admirable. What was it? Why did she lie to protect the spies? Why did she hide them under the stalks of flax on her roof? Why did she risk her own life instead of turning them in to the authorities?

8 Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, **9** and said to the men: "I know that the Lord has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. **10** For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. **11** And as soon as we heard *these things*, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. **12** Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the Lord, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father's house, and give me a true token, **13** and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death."

What a woman of faith! What a woman of great character! She believed that the God of the Israelites was the only true God! She had heard about His mighty acts (He dried up the Red Sea forty years ago, and she was still talking about it). She testified that God is the Lord of all - and this coming from a woman who lived in a culture that believed in many gods, all of them false.

What a woman of courage! She risked her life to save the Israelite spies.

What a woman of a tender heart! She loved her family, and spoke out for their safety. She was a great lover of souls. She believed the report that God was going to give the Israelites the land, and she wanted her family to be spared. She had faith that if she showed Israel kindness, kindness would be shown her in return.

Never mind that she was a harlot. Never mind that she lied - isn't that what heathens do? She was a woman of great faith, and God was going to deliver her and make her a part of the household of faith. God was going to make all things new for Rahab.

Joshua 2:14 So the men answered her, "Our lives for yours, if none of you tell this business of ours. And it shall be, when the Lord has given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you."

15 Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall. **16** And she said to them, "Get to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you. Hide there three days, until the pursuers have returned. Afterward you may go your way."

17 So the men said to her: "We *will be* blameless of this oath of yours which you have made us swear,

18 unless, *when* we come into the land, you bind this line of scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father's household to your own home. **19** So it shall be *that* whoever goes outside the doors of your house into the street, his blood *shall be* on his own head, and we *will be* guiltless. And whoever is with you in the house, his blood *shall be* on our head if a hand is laid on him. **20** And if you tell this business of ours, then we will be free from your oath which you made us swear."

21 Then she said, "According to your words, so be it." And she sent them away, and they departed. And she bound the scarlet cord in the window.

There are several pictures in this story that are worth noting.

First of all, the spies were hidden under stalks of flax, from which linen cloth is made. Linen in the Bible is said to signify the righteousness of the saints (see Rev. 19:7-8). When Rahab hid the spies under the flax (linen), she did a good work that was evidence of her faith in God.

Second, Rahab knew that God's judgment was coming upon Jericho. God made it plain that he was going to destroy the nations and cities of Canaan because of their terrible sins. The destruction of Jericho is a picture of the coming judgment of this world, and the final judgment day. Rahab believed that judgment was coming, and she made preparations to be delivered from it - both for herself and her family.

Third, Rahab was to take the scarlet cord and tie it in the window of her house as a sign to the Israelite army to spare her home. Scarlet is the color of blood, and we see in this part of the story a picture of the blood of Jesus saving us from destruction. Forty years before this, the firstborn of the Israelite families were saved when the blood of the lamb was applied to the lintel of the house. God said, "*When I see the blood, I will pass over you.*" Again, in this story, death would "pass over" all who were in Rahab's house. One of the conditions of deliverance was to *stay in the house*. Just as the Apostle Paul said, "*Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved,*" during the shipwreck in Acts 27, God's theme throughout Scripture is that we must stay in the household of faith to be saved. We need the church - that old "ship of Zion" - in order to be delivered from death.

We see the spies speaking plainly to Rahab after they have made an oath to spare her and her family. They tell her what she must do:

- 1) She must bind the scarlet cord in the window of her home.
- 2) She must bring her family into her own home.
- 3) She must keep it a secret that the spies visited her and Israel is about to destroy Jericho.

Joshua 2:22 They departed and went to the mountain, and stayed there three days until the pursuers returned. The pursuers sought *them* all along the way, but did not find *them*. **23** So the two men returned, descended from the mountain, and crossed over; and they came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all that had befallen them. **24** And they said to Joshua, "Truly the Lord has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are fainthearted because of us."

The report of these two spies was much different from the report of the ten spies forty years ago. They told Joshua that their enemies were disheartened and dispirited, and they were poised to win. Likewise, we need to be an encouragement to our brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to speak words of faith and trust in the promises of God. If God's word says it, we can believe it. We need to admonish one another that we can be victorious, and the Lord will be with us in all of our "battles."

Did the spies provide any valuable information for Joshua? Probably. But their report did not change the fact that God was going to give them Jericho. However, the scouting expedition was going to change everything for Rahab and her family. Twice in the New Testament, Rahab is mentioned as a woman of great faith, in the passage in Hebrews that we mentioned earlier and also in James:

James 2:21 Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? **22** You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. **23** And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." . . .

25 Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. **26** Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.

God rewarded Rahab - not for her lie - but for her hospitality, her courage, her taking part in the mission of Israel, her confession of the name of the God of Israel, and her faith in the greatness of the God of Israel.

Did the spies stop at Rahab's house by accident? No. God led them there for her sake. We will read in a future lesson that Rahab is saved when Jericho is destroyed. She becomes the wife of a head of the tribe of Judah - Salmon. Some Bible scholars think that he was one of the two spies. Her grandchild's grandchild was King David, and Jesus Christ was her descendant. Rahab cast her lot with the people of God; and she was lifted up, given mercy, and set among princes.

Joshua Chapter 3

Joshua chapters 3 and 4 tell the story of the Israelites crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land. This was the younger generation who were children during the Red Sea crossing or were born in the wilderness. Now they were going to experience something very similar to the Red Sea crossing.

When the two spies entered Jericho and received help from Rahab the harlot, Rahab told them:

Joshua 2:10 (NLT) For we have heard how the Lord made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt.

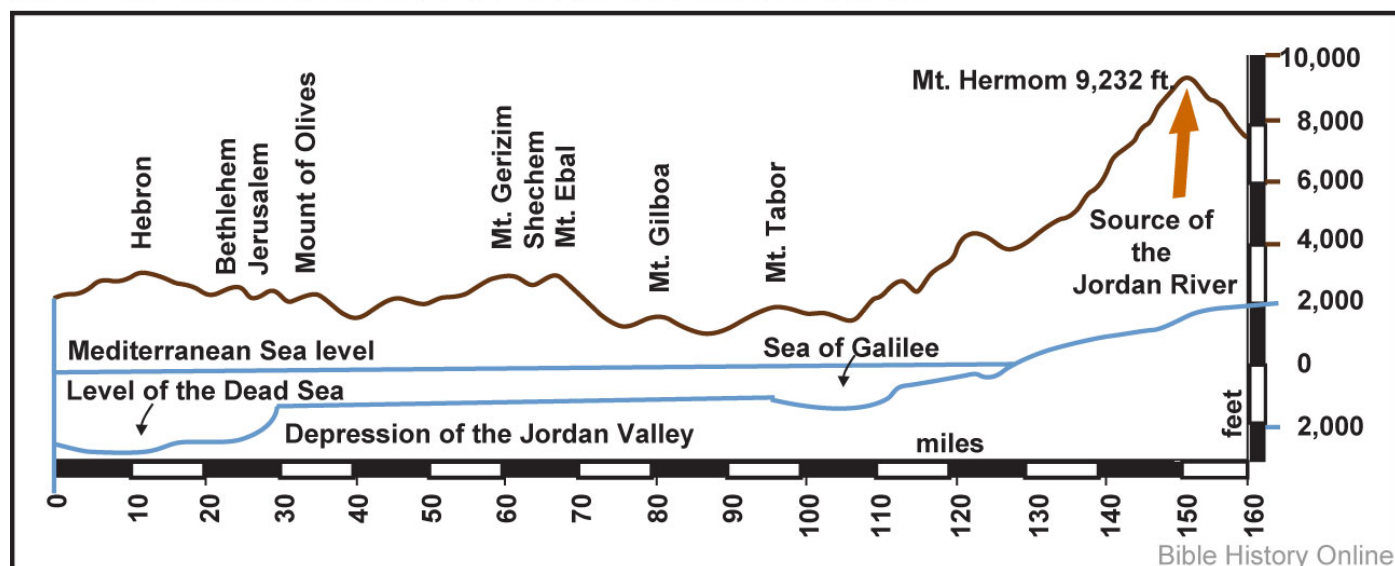
This miracle, though it happened forty years ago, was still the talk of the people of Canaan. Now, God was going to instill fear in the hearts of the Canaanites by making a dry path through the Jordan River for the Israelites to enter into Canaan's land.

The Jordan River

The Jordan River runs from north to south, marking the eastern border of the Promised Land. Four tributaries form the upper Jordan River (two from Lebanon and two from Mount Hermon). The main source of the Jordan is from snow melt from Mt. Hermon. Other tributaries flow into the lower Jordan as it makes its way southward to the Dead Sea.

The Jordan River is only 156 miles long and actually flows through the Sea of Galilee. It makes quite a trip from Mt. Hermon in the Golan Heights (elevation 9232 feet) down to the Dead Sea (elevation 1443 feet *below* sea level).

MAP OF THE PROFILE OF THE JORDAN RIVER



During Joshua's day, the Jordan carried a lot of water. Today, much water is taken from the Jordan for irrigation purposes and as a source of water by the countries of Israel and Jordan. Therefore, if one looks at the Jordan River today, one is surprised how small it looks at the place where the Israelites crossed it. A 2010 study states that the lower Jordan has been reduced to 2% of its historic flow. Also, the water level of the Dead Sea has gone down greatly, and this is of great concern in the modern country of Israel.

Joshua Chapter 3

Joshua 3:1 (NLT) Early the next morning Joshua and all the Israelites left Acacia Grove and arrived at the banks of the Jordan River, where they camped before crossing.

The two spies had returned from their three day trip to scout out the city of Jericho and its nearby territory. Joshua had previously told the people what the

Lord had told him - that they would cross the Jordan: *Joshua then commanded the officers of Israel, "Go through the camp and tell the people to get their provisions ready. In three days you will cross the Jordan River and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you"* (Joshua 1:10-11). After the spies returned and gave their report, the people moved from Acacia Grove where they had been camped to the banks of the Jordan.

Joshua 3:2 Three days later the Israelite officers went through the camp, **3** giving these instructions to the people: "When you see the Levitical priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God, move out from your positions and follow them. **4** Since you have never traveled this way before, they will guide you. Stay about half a mile behind them [KJV: 2000 cubits], keeping a clear distance between you and the Ark. Make sure you don't come any closer."

The people were to follow the Ark. We learn from Numbers 4 that the Ark was covered with several coverings by the High Priest, Aaron, and his sons, before it was moved (the Ark was first covered with the veil, then badger skins, then a blue cloth). Then the Levites were told to carry it, but they were not allowed to look at it. The furnishings of the Tabernacle were to be carried by certain Levites called the Kohathites, or the descendants of Kohath (Aaron was also a descendant of Kohath). In our story today, we read that the priests (or descendants of Aaron) carried the Ark toward the Jordan. Not only were they Kohathites, but they were priests.

Even though it was covered, the people were warned to keep their distance from the Ark. The Ark was the place where the presence of God dwelt in Old Testament times. The Israelites had never traveled that way before, but the Ark was going to guide them.

5 Then Joshua told the people, "Purify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do great wonders among you."

God was getting ready to do something new and great, and so the people were ordered to purify themselves, or "sanctify themselves," as the KJV says. They were to separate themselves from all other cares and cleanse themselves. They were God's people with God's law, preparing to go into the land that God was giving them.

6 In the morning Joshua said to the priests, "Lift up the Ark of the Covenant and lead the people across the river." And so they started out and went ahead of the people.

The Ark of the Lord was going to lead the way for the armies of Israel. The Ark would be unprotected (being a half mile ahead of the rest), but yet the Ark itself would be their defense. They were going in the name of the Lord and in the Spirit of the Lord, obeying the Word of the Lord.

7 The Lord told Joshua, "Today I will begin to make you a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites. They will know that I am with you, just as I was with Moses.

We mentioned in a previous lesson that Joshua is a type or picture of Jesus Christ. The name *Joshua* is the same name as *Jesus* (*Joshua* from the Hebrew language and *Jesus* from Greek). Moses is a type or picture of Jesus Christ



because he led the people out of bondage.

Joshua is a picture of Jesus Christ because he leads the people into a new life. Both are aspects of what Jesus Christ does for us. Jesus leads us out of sin and bondage and into a new life, the life of the Spirit.

In verse 7 we see the Lord speaking directly to Joshua just as He spoke directly to Moses. God said that He was going to



The Jordan River today

make Joshua a great leader in the eyes of the people. When Moses divided the Red Sea, Israel was thoroughly convinced that God was with him. Even the New Testament says that they were *baptized unto Moses in the sea* (1 Cor. 10:2). After Moses took them across the Red Sea on dry ground, they were fully convinced that God was with them and that Moses was their God-appointed leader:

Exodus 14:31 When the people of Israel saw the mighty power that the Lord had unleashed against the Egyptians, they were filled with awe before him. They put their faith in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

Now, God was going to use Joshua to bring the people through the Jordan River, and His plan was to get the people to *believe* in Him - and in Joshua, their leader. They were going to need faith for the battles ahead.

It is interesting to know that at this same place on the Jordan River where God began to make Joshua great in the eyes of the people, God began to make Jesus Christ great in the eyes of the people - at His baptism in the Jordan River in this very same place, opposite Jericho. John the Baptist proclaimed that one was coming who was very great, and then Jesus appeared to be baptized of John:

Mark 1:4 (NKJV) John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. **5** Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. . . **7** And [John] preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. **8** I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

9 It came to pass in those days *that* Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

Joshua 3:8 (NLT) Give this command to the priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant: "When you reach the banks of the Jordan River, take a few steps into the river and stop there."

9 So Joshua told the Israelites, "Come and listen to what the Lord your God says. **10** Today you will know that the living God is among you. He will surely drive out the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites ahead of you. **11** Look, the Ark of the Covenant, which belongs to the Lord of the whole earth, will lead you across the Jordan River! **12** Now choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. **13** The priests will carry the Ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth. As soon as their feet touch the water, the flow of water will be cut off upstream, and the river will stand up like a wall."

The priests were literally going to "step out in faith." When they did, the waters upstream would be cut off. It would probably take a little while for the waters to flow past before the riverbed was completely dry, but God could be trusted.

What God did before, He was going to do again! The power that brought them out of Egypt was going to bring them into Canaan's land. For us, the same power that brought us out of sin will bring us into victorious Christian living in Christ. God brings us out, and God brings us in.

Psalms 114:3 (NLT) The Red Sea saw them coming and hurried out of their way!

The water of the Jordan River turned away . . .

5 What's wrong, Red Sea, that made you hurry out of their way?

What happened, Jordan River, that you turned away? . . .

7 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord,
at the presence of the God of Jacob.

Joshua 3:14 So the people left their camp to cross the Jordan, and the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them. **15** It was the harvest season, and the Jordan was overflowing its banks.

We mentioned previously that the Jordan River today is a small stream because most of the water has been removed for irrigation and use by the people of the countries of Israel and Jordan. However, in Joshua's day, the Jordan River was a mighty stream in normal times, and now the river was swollen. It was late spring, and the snowmelt from Mount Hermon made the Jordan overflow its banks.

According to an Israeli weather website, Mount Hermon gets about 50 inches of precipitation per year in this modern era. It is very probable that it received more rainfall in ancient times. God chose this time of year - when the Jordan overflowed its banks - to lead His people across.



But as soon as the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark touched the water at the river's edge, **16** the water above that point began backing up a great distance away at a town called Adam, which is near Zarethan. And the water below that point flowed on to the Dead Sea until the riverbed was dry. Then all the people crossed over near the town of Jericho.

When the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea forty years earlier, God caused the water on either side of them to remain firm like a wall. They passed through on dry ground (even the muddy sea bed was dry). Now as they were

crossing the Jordan River, the waters made a wall on the northern side a great distance away at Adam (about 18 miles upstream). On the southern side, the waters flowed on down toward the Dead Sea.

God caused the riverbed to be dry as the Israelites walked across. The nation didn't need to go across single file. Instead, they could march across quickly over several miles of dry riverbed. They were right where they needed to be, heading straight toward Jericho, which was only a few miles away. Jericho was one of the strongest cities in Canaan, but God was leading them toward it.

17 Meanwhile, the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Lord's Covenant stood on dry ground in the middle of the riverbed as the people passed by. They waited there until the whole nation of Israel had crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

God commanded the priests to stand in the middle of the dried up river while the people crossed. This gave the people confidence that the same God that parted the waters was going to keep the river parted until all had passed. Remember, this was a new experience for many of these people. They had only heard the story of the Red Sea crossing from their parents. Now, it was time for them to experience the miracle power of God for themselves. As for the priests, they must have faith that God will fulfill his word. They did, and He did.