

# Joshua 3

## A New Life Begins

The book of Joshua recalls a period of transition for Israel.

After spending a lifetime in the wilderness a new generation arises who, unlike their fathers will walk in the promises of God. This new generation will serve as a vivid picture of the child of God learning to step out in faith and walk in the Spirit.

When Paul referenced Israel to the Corinthians he stated,

1 Corinthians 10:1-5

*Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.*

Paul is making a comparison between crossing the Red Sea and baptism. Although the Israelites were never submerged in the waters they serve as a fitting example of a person identifying with Christ in baptism.

If we fast forward forty years to Joshua 3-4 we find Israel once again passing through the sea. This would serve as an illustration of a different event. Jesus referred to a second baptism, a baptism not into water but into the Spirit. This marks a transformation in the life of a believer who receives enabling from God to live out the Christian life.

The book of Acts which tells the story of the birth and spreading of the first church references the Spirit 68 times. Most are directly referring to the Spirit of God.

As we follow Joshua and the tribes of Israel we will see vivid examples of how to and how not to move forward into experiencing the promises of God.

Joshua 3:1

*Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they set out from Acacia Grove and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they crossed over.*

The first step was to prepare the tribes to enter the Land.

This preparation involved

A change of location.

They left the Acacia Grove where Moses had spent the final month and a half of his life giving exposition on the Law of God. He used the word of God to prepare the people for the life ahead of them.

Application 1

We must be men and women of the book. We must establish the fact that our life will be built upon the solid foundation of the word of God. Jesus compared the person who chose to do that to a house built upon the rock. It would do us all well to divide our life up into its categories and allow the word of God to examine each area.

For instance;

If you are married, have you searched the scriptures to define the roles and responsibilities of a Christian spouse?

If not, take the time today to do so. Carefully read Ephesians 5:22-33, 1Peter 3:1-7 and 1Corinthians 7. Be careful to read it for yourself and not as a way to put an increasing burden on your spouse.

It would be a benefit to do the same thing if you are a parent, child, employee, employer, pastor or pastor to be. The more we allow the word of God to shape who we are the more effective we will become for the Kingdom of God.

Now Joshua must take the people from absorbing the Word of God to putting it into practice. They must move on from where they are to where God wants to take them.

Forward motion is necessary but often challenging. It is our nature to want to remain where we are.

However scripture encourages us to move beyond where we are.

Hebrews 5:12

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.*

Hebrews 6:1

*Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection...*

Joshua bears the responsibility of taking Israel from where they are to where God desires them to be.

## Application 2

That is much of the role of the church and the pastoral staff. As we study through the word together we uncover the changes God desires to make, then with the help of the fellowship of believers God works those things in us.

The more connected we become with the church the more likely we will be to develop the character qualities of Christ in our lives.

I recently sat next to a power lifter on a plane. He took up his seat and 1/2 of mine. Because we were sharing a space it was easy to strike up a conversation. I discovered that he weighed 400lbs and could lift the weight of our entire row. He probably needs very little help when it comes to the heavy lifting in life. But most of us are not power lifters. When the couch needs moving we need assistance. The church is designed to assist you in the heavy lifting of the Christian life. The areas where you are thriving on your own you need less assistance with, but the areas where you are struggling you should seek some helping hands.

Joshua 3:2-4

*So it was, after three days, that the officers went through the camp; and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it. Yet there shall be a space between you and it,*

*about two thousand cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way before.”*

After arriving at the shore of the Jordan river Joshua continued to instruct Israel regarding the preparations they needed to make in order to move forward into the promises of God.

First on the list was a new gps system.

The leaders reminded the people that they had not been this way before. Since they were walking into uncharted territory they needed a guide that was tried and true. God gave clear directions to Joshua and exhorted the people to let nothing get between themselves and their view of the ark. As long as they could see the ark they would know where to go when they walked in new territory.

Kristie and I recently took a road trip through Hungary, Slovakia, Chec republic and Poland. Having never been that way before and since she was in charge of navigation she chose to download several gps apps. We had tremendous success and rarely went off course except for the few times I chose to ignore the instructions and follow my own sense of direction. In those cases we inevitably ended up off course and lost.

Life is like that. We all think we have a built in sonar for what is right and best. However when we follow that without the clear guidance of scripture we will get off course. Joshua and Israel needed to keep the ways of God right before their eyes.

They did that by placing themselves in the best location in which to see what God was doing and where they were supposed to go.

### Application 3

God can speak to us anywhere. We find God speaking through a burning bush, a wicked prophet and even a beast of burden. That does not mean that you should run of to the desert or the zoo in search of direction for your life. God's primary way of instructing us in through His word. The more familiar we become with our bibles the greater likelihood we have of knowing where God is leading and how to follow.

Some practical tips for keeping God's ways in your line of sight

- Have daily devotions. We do that by reading the Bible every day. You can find a simple reading plan at [CCVB.net/resources](http://CCVB.net/resources)
- Pick up a good devotional. Daily devotions are available through the word at [pjimgallagher.com](http://pjimgallagher.com)

- Participate in regular church attendance and a connect group

Joshua 3:5

*And Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you."*

Second on the list of preparations was the need to make some personal changes

Before the tribes could walk in the promises of God they needed to do a bit of self examination. They were on the lookout for anything in their lives that was contrary to the word of God. They might have found some behaviors that were left over from Egypt or from the generation who didn't want to go further with the Lord. Those things had to be set aside if Israel was to move on.

I read an interesting little booklet that compared the Christian life to a home. It told the story of Jesus entering into a person's home, He was welcomed into certain rooms but others were closed off. As time went on the rooms were opened up to Him and cleaned out by Him making the house much more livable and beautiful. Before we move forward there might be a bit of cleanup that needs to take place in some of the more secret areas of life.

But the word sanctify means much more than that. It also carries the idea of being set apart.

Salvation includes more than changing behavior it also allows us to participate with God in the work He desires to do in the world. When we sanctify ourselves we are enlisting in the work of God. We are choosing to join in His efforts to reach the lost and serve the saved.

Joshua 3:6

*Then Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, "Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over before the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people.*

The rest of the chapter explains how they carried the ark to the edge of the river, put their feet in the waters, watched the river subside and remained there carrying the ark until the entire nation had crossed the river.

Joshua 3:17

*Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.*

Joshua 4:10-11

*So the priests who bore the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the Lord had commanded Joshua to speak to the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua; and the people hurried and crossed over. Then it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over, that the ark of the Lord and the priests crossed over in the presence of the people.*

Israel is standing on the shore of the Jordan River, they have set themselves apart unto the Lord and removed all compromise from their lives. It is now time to enter the new life God always intended for them.

This will require effort on the part of the priests and a willingness on the part of the people

The role of the priests

Certain priests were selected to have the honor and responsibility of bearing the ark as they crossed the river. It would be their feet that first touched the Jordan and watched as the waters receded but it was also their shoulders that would bear the weight of the ark.

The ark was a wooden box, overlaid in gold and carried with wooden poles that were inserted into rings on the four corners of the ark. Conservative estimants suggest that the ark would have weighed nearly 200lbs. Needless to say this would put a great strain on the shoulders of those who carried it.

They marched to the shore of the river, walked out into the middle and remained standing with the weight of the ark pressing down upon them until every Israelite crossed into Canaan.

Ministry is often like that.

There is a great honor associated with serving the Lord. But there is also much labor involved. Some of the terms used to describe those who are involved in ministry

include; bond slave, under rower, hard working farmer, soldier, laborer and workman. All of these terms suggest that serving Jesus is a lot of work.

Many of us want to see rivers part but some of us are not willing to put the work in to do it.

Paul saw amazing things happen but partially due to the fact that he was willing to sanctify himself and partly due to the fact he was willing to endure challenges to bring the gospel to others. Today much blame is placed upon faith as though it were the missing link in seeing God work. In some cases I am sure that is true, but in others I am convinced it is due to lack of labor. Those who are willing to put the work in to serve Christ often have tremendous stories to tell of the faithfulness of God. I know a young man who serves Christ in Siberia. He was drawn there because of an unreached people group who follow the reindeer migration through that region. His willingness to go and the great effort involved in getting there has allowed him to see God do things in and through his life.

It would be a crime if we failed to attribute hard work as part of the successful endeavors of Paul. By his own admission he stated;

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

*We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—*

Ministry happens when hard work and heaven meet together

#### Application 4

What are you willing to pick up for the sake of serving Christ?

And how long are you willing to carry it?

Much ministry remains undone in the church and in the world simply because people are unwilling to pick it up and carry it along.

Two types of people come to mind.

The first are those who don't seem to be able to get started. Fear, busy schedules, lack of priority cause some to never quite get a round to it. They might be addressed by Jesus in the parable of the great supper

Luke 14:18

*But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.'*

The other are those who start strong but fail to carry through. They might be addressed in the parable of the sower

Mark 4:5

*Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth.*

I have heard them referred to as "firecracker christians" they make a splendid spark but are gone in a flash.

Successful ministry takes time and patience. Our history with CCVB illustrates this principle clearly. Our first Sunday we had nearly 25 people in attendance, the second week we were down to 15. We shrunk by 40% in one bible study. Fast forward 4 1/2 years and we had grown to nearly 30 adults. The ministry was slow but over time God began to bless. We have seen amazing things accomplished not overnight but due to steady faithfulness on the part of those who serve.

It is also important to notice the role of Israel.

They were required to follow their leaders, and make their way across the river.

Sometimes it takes as much faith to follow a new leader as it does put your feet in the water hoping the river will part.