

Joshua: Walking by Faith, Growing in Grace

Crossing the River

Joshua 3:1-17

June 29, 2025

HDBC

On the night of December 25-26, 1776, General George Washington led his Continental Army across the Delaware River in order to lead them in a surprise attack on the Hessian forces in Trenton, NJ. It led to a crucial victory which boosted morale during a very difficult time in the war.

Bodies of water have always provided a natural barrier to invading armies and thus a sense of security for those protected by them. That's why bridges were so important during WWII, and during all wars. It's difficult to move an army past a major river without a bridge. In Joshua 3 we find a river providing a sense of protection for the inhabitants of the land, and creating what appeared to be an obstacle for the army of Israel. However, with God, nothing is impossible, and apparent obstacles are no match.

We now come to one of those decisive moments in the life of the nation of Israel. This chapter relates the crossing of the Jordan River by the Israelites. Once before, God had opened up a body of water and allowed them to cross on dry land. Now, he would do it again.

Before, He opened the Red Sea to allow them to **escape slavery**.

Now, He opens the Jordan River to allow them to **find freedom**.

Before, He opened the Red Sea to allow them to **escape conflict**.

Now, He opens the Jordan River in order to **bring them into conflict**.

Before, He opened the Red Sea to deliver them from **forced captivity**.

Now, He opens the Jordan River to deliver them from **self-inflicted captivity**.

The crossing of the Jordan is a beautiful picture of the believer who has completely yielded himself to Christ, who is dead to self and alive to Christ. The person who is living in the fulness of God's abundant life & blessings.

Let's consider the chapter by looking at three actions.

1. Act of Getting Ready (1)

D-Day in American history signified the beginning of the land invasion of Europe by the allied forces, at least on the western front. It was the start of a year-long effort to liberate Europe from Nazi Germany.

However, the preparation for that invasion had been going on for more than a year. In order to cross the English channel and invade Europe the Allied forces had to move into position. Prior to the invasion over 2 million soldiers from a dozen countries assembled in England. Millions of tons of equipment. Just to get ready.

Joshua led the people in a similar move. **Shittim** was the place where Israel was camped when the spies were sent out from the camp. They returned and gave a wonderful report. Joshua set the people into motion. They moved to the Jordan.

They were facing a major transition. Crossing the Jordan was not like moving to another neighborhood. It was more than a geographic move. It involved a move from being a nomadic people to being a nation with real estate. They would be planting in their new land. There would be no turning back. Once over the river, they were committed.

Have you ever been there? Have you been at the point of making a major decision to really trust Christ? To lay it all on the altar? To hold nothing back from Christ? To trust Him completely? **Maybe it was on a youth retreat or during a church revival. Maybe during the invitation when the Holy Spirit was clearly working, calling, leading.**

Brought you to the edge of the river, beckoning you to step in & walk over. Some of you did, & others are still camped on the wrong side of the river, waiting. **Not Joshua.** For him, being on the wrong side of the river would never satisfy. He would trust God and step forward.

2. **Act of Getting Organized (2-13)** Involved instructions to 3 parties. The people, the leader (Joshua), the priests.

1) Instructions to the people (2-12) Two things

In verse 2 we read that the leaders of the people went through the camp telling them exactly how they were going to cross the Jordan. These men had been instructed by Joshua and were preparing the people for Joshua's coming command. They were laying the groundwork. Getting the people ready. Notice what they said.

a. Follow the ark (2-4, 9-12)

It would be very simple. The people would follow the Ark of God.

This would be a new way of being led by God. No longer would there be a cloud by day or a fire by night. Now, they would be led by God, and by implication through His word, which was found in summary inside the Ark in the form of the commandments. They were entering new territory, and being led in a new way. But it would be the same God leading them.

The Ark was a gold-plated box, four feet by two feet by two feet. It housed the commandments of God given to Moses. It was a symbol of the presence of God.

The picture here is not hard to see. God was telling the people that He, Himself would be leading them through the Jordan and into the land which He was giving to them. All they had to do was ***follow Him***. They would be tempted to look at the river, the challenge, the problem. They were to look to the Ark instead.

That's the way it is with God. He doesn't take us to the edge of some dark precipice, then give us a nudge. He leads us through the dark nights of our lives. Especially the troubles & difficulties.

In its simplest way this reminds us of how we need to follow the revealed presence of God. In other words, wherever you see God at work, be there and join in with it. Let God lead you through his own redemptive actions with people.

b. Consecrate yourselves (5)

Joshua then addresses the people, telling them to consecrate themselves. To set themselves apart for God's special use. One of my favorite passages in N. T. speaks of being a

Vessel of honor, useful to the master, sanctified, prepared for every good work.

God was about to do a great thing not only **for** them, but **in** them. In order for them to be spiritually able to respond to God and to see him working in them, they needed to be clean and pure. Confession of sin. Setting things right, etc.

2) Instructions to Joshua (7)

Two things

a. Instruct the people (5-6)

Joshua had the responsibility to telling the people what God had said and how He was going to work in them. Remember, they have camped on the banks of this swollen river for three days.

During normal times the river was 100 feet wide. During flood times it could be as wide as a mile. Maybe this was God's way of pointing out the utter impossibility of crossing that river without a miracle. Some estimate that this is a group of 2 million people.

b. Trust the Lord (7)

Joshua's message to the people was one of faith. He was telling them that they were just going to walk right across the river. It not only would take courage to believe it, but more courage to tell it to others.

Therefore, God offers a word of encouragement to Joshua. God would confirm through the fulfillment of these plans that Joshua really was his successor to Moses.

3) Instructions to the priests (8, 13)

Two things

a. Carry the ark (8)

A group of them were to carry the Ark. Many years later David would learn a hard lesson about transporting the ark in a manner other than God's prescribed way. Here, they were doing it right.

b. Step into the Water (13)

This is where their faith would be tested. They were to walk right into the Jordan River. Their feet would get wet. Their faith would be representative of the faith of the people.

God does not always solve our problems from a distance. Many times he wants us to step out in faith. In this case, he would not open the river until they stepped into it. This would be a clear indication that this was truly a miracle of God, not simply a natural phenomenon.

3. Act of Crossing Over (14-17)

These verses simply tell us that it happened exactly the way the Lord predicted. The priests stepped into the muddy waters. Their feet were covered. At that moment God stopped the flow of water 16 miles upstream creating a dry riverbed. BTW, this is the most important action. Everything moved toward this. The verb **to cross** is used at least 22 times in chapters 3-4. It is the key.

The priests carried the Ark to the middle and held it there. There they witnessed God's miraculous power. But they would have stood on the banks of that river all day, had they not stepped into the muddy waters. Sometimes, not always, but sometimes, God wants us to step out in faith before He acts. Sometimes we must get our feet wet before the ground becomes dry. In fact that is the essence of faith. If we always wait until He acts, where is the faith?

Picture of God's powerful presence making a way through the river.

The entire camp made their way across. When they crossed the Jordan, they were cut off from their old life. Those who chose to go over into the Promised Land began a new life from that day on with a new identification. There was no need to go back across the river. And, I might add, there was no way to go back. Once they got across the river began to flow again. They were committed!!

Closing Thoughts:

The crossing of the Jordan beautifully pictures an aspect of salvation that some people fail to grasp. Coming out of Egypt signals our deliverance from slavery to sin and the condemnation that comes with it. Crossing the Jordan river pictures living in obedience to the will of God in our lives. Moses said it well (Deut. 6:23), *He brought us out . . . that He might bring us in*. God brought them out of slavery to bring them into the promised land. God delivered us from the penalty of our sins that He might bring us into the fulness living in His will. Coming out of Egypt was a beginning but not an end. Your initial salvation was a beginning, not an end.

Throughout your life with Christ, there will be times when God calls you to cross another river, stepping out in faith. Could be a call to

Fulltime ministry. Lead a small group. **Serve kids/youth/nursery.** Share your testimony. **Go on a mission trip.** Serve as a deacon. **Join a ministry team.** Give to the church. **Have family devotions.** Volunteer to help another Christian grow spiritually.

Unless we are willing to step into the water and get your feet wet, God will not be able to use as He wants. God honors people of faith.