

## Lesson 65

# Israel Crosses the Jordan

God provided safe passage across the Jordan River for Joshua and the Israelites.

# Overview

## Lesson Focus

God blocked the Jordan River so the Israelites could cross into the promised land. The priests, carrying the ark of the covenant, showed faith by leading the people and stepping into the flooded river before it dried up. Joshua set up 12 memorial stones to remind future generations of this miracle.

## Key Passages

Joshua 3:14–17, 4:19–24; Luke 22:19–20

## Objectives

Students will be able to:

Describe how God provided safe passage through the Jordan River.  
Identify the purpose of the memorial stones.

## Memory Verse

Deuteronomy 7:9 Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.

## Prepare to Share

### Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

Unlike the previous spy mission that Moses sent into the Promised Land, Joshua's spies came back from Jericho with the encouraging news that all the people in the land were afraid of them (Joshua 2:24). Joshua was ready to enter the land and begin the conquest. There was only one problem—the Jordan River lay between Israel's camp and the Promised Land! To make matters worse, the river was at flood stage, overflowing its banks (Joshua 3:15). God commanded Joshua to have the priests carry the ark of the covenant and lead the way to the river. The people were commanded to consecrate themselves as they would before a festival or worship. Consecration usually involved physical cleansing (bathing and washing clothes) and abstaining from unclean or common things or activities. Consecration prepared them for an encounter with God. The people were also to remain a respectful distance behind the priests carrying the ark (Joshua 3:2–6).

Next came a true test of faith. The priests were commanded to step into the waters of the Jordan River. They obeyed and witnessed an amazing display of

God's power. When their feet entered the water, the Lord stopped the waters of the river north of their location, at a city named Adam about 15 miles away. The water heaped up, and the ground dried up. The priests carried the ark into the middle of the riverbed and stood there while the people hurried to cross over (Joshua 3:15–17).

Joshua collected 12 stones and piled them where the priests stood as a marker of God's power and presence. As commanded by God and Joshua, a leader from each tribe of Israel also collected a stone from the riverbed, but they brought their stones to the other side (Joshua 4:8–9). After everyone was safely across, Joshua told the priests to follow. This time, when their feet reached the opposite bank, the waters of the Jordan were unblocked and returned to their normal flooded area (Joshua 4:18).

The Israelites set up their first camp in the Promised Land and called it Gilgal. Here, Joshua took the 12 stones from each tribe and set them up as a memorial of God's miracle at the Jordan. He commanded the people to teach their children the meaning of the stones. They were a reminder of God's faithfulness and power so they would fear the Lord always (Joshua 4:19–24).

The miracles of God parting the Red Sea for Moses and stopping the Jordan River for Joshua marked the beginning and ending of Israel's journey through the wilderness. The miracles also exalted the leadership of Moses and Joshua so the people would respect and obey them (Joshua 3:7). News of these miracles spread throughout the land of Canaan, causing the people to fear the Lord and recognize his power.

## Historical/Apologetics Background

There are natural theories that have been used to explain God's miracle of stopping the Jordan River. In 1927, an earthquake and landslide occurred in a similar location to the ancient city of Adam on the Jordan River, blocking its flow. While this may be the method God chose, several details indicate divine intervention. For example, the timing of the miracle to have the waters stop when the priests stepped into the river required God's intervention. The timing of the stoppage could have been hours to an entire day, but the waters returned to flood stage the moment the priests crossed to the opposite bank. We don't always need to search for natural explanations to God's miracles; we can trust his Word is true.

However God chose to accomplish this miracle, he marked its importance in the history of Israel by having Joshua erect the 12 memorial stones. Knowing how quickly the next generation could forget and turn away from him, God commanded Joshua to tell parents to teach their children what the stones meant. Future generations needed to hear how God worked on behalf of his people.

In addition to its significance as a miraculous event in Israel's history, the Jordan River remains an important geographical landmark with applications for the spiritual life. The winding 223 miles of the river actually cover a distance of only 124 miles from its source at Mount Hermon through the Sea of Galilee to where it empties into the Dead Sea. It has the lowest elevation of any other

river on earth. Today, it forms the border between Israel and the country of Jordan. In Joshua's day, it was the final obstacle before he and the Israelites could enter the land of Canaan and take possession of the land God promised them. In contrast, the Red Sea marked the first obstacle in Israel's journey from bondage to freedom. The Red Sea crossing has been compared to the rescue of the sinner from bondage to sin through Jesus. And the Jordan River has been said to signify the transition to new life through victorious Christian living. During the wilderness wanderings, the Israelites were free from Egypt, yet they often longed to return. Egypt was still in their hearts just as sin remains in our flesh. It was with the new generation raised in the wilderness that God chose to give the Promised Land. They crossed with eagerness and faith into a new land.

The Jordan River also signified transitions for individual people. It showed a transition of leadership from Moses to Joshua and from Elijah to Elisha. The same miracle of the Jordan parting occurred for both Elijah and Elisha as the mantle of God's Spirit passed from teacher to student (2 Kings 2:6–14). The correlation of transition and the Jordan River continued in the New Testament. The Jordan River was where John the Baptist baptized people coming to repentance (Matthew 3:1–6). It was also where John baptized Jesus, signifying the beginning of his earthly ministry.

Just as God dried up the Red Sea to deliver his people from bondage in Egypt and dried up the Jordan River to lead his people to victory in the Promised Land, he has delivered us from the penalty of sin through faith in Christ and is delivering us from the power of sin by the sanctifying work of his Holy Spirit. And one day he will deliver us from the very presence of sin. Blessed be his holy name!

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