

Crossing the Jordan

Joshua 3 - 5:12



After receiving a favorable report from the spies that were sent into Canaan, Joshua and all the Israelites (around 900,000) left Shittim and travelled six miles to the Jordan River where they camped before crossing.

The Israelites faced the prospect of crossing the fast flowing river with fear and trepidation. Human effort and ingenuity would not be adequate for this impossible situation. Despite their fears and doubts, God would perform a miracle the following day that would never be forgotten by them or their children.

- *Preparation for the crossing (3:1-13)*
- *Procedure of the crossing (3:14-17; 4:10-19)*
- *Memorial of crossing (4:1-9, 20-24)*
- *consecration after the crossing (5:1-12)*

What does it say?

What does it mean?

Joshua 3:1-17



¹Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. ²After three days the officers went throughout the camp, ³giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. ⁴Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it."

⁵Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."

⁶Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people." So they took it up and went ahead of them.

And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that

3:1-6 Read the first six verses of Chapter 3 and and list the commands given to the Israelites in preparation for the crossing.

Why do you think the Israelites were to follow the Ark of the Covenant at a distance of 1,000 yards?

The Ark of the Covenant was a rectangular box made of Acacia wood 3¾ feet long and 2¼ feet wide and high. It was plated with gold inside and out and had four carrying poles used to transport it. The Ark of the Covenant contained the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone, a jar full of manna, and Aaron's rod that had budded.

The Ark symbolized the agreement that existed between the children of Israel and God. (For more details of that agreement see Genesis 12-15 and Deuteronomy 26-30.)

God's presence regularly appeared in a cloud over the top of the Ark. When the cloud lifted and moved it was a signal for the Israelites to advance.

What does it say?

I am with you as I was with Moses.⁸ Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: `When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.'"

Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God.¹⁰ This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites.¹¹ See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you.¹² Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe.¹³ And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD -- the Lord of all the earth -- set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap."

So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them.¹⁵ Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge,¹⁶ the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho.¹⁷ The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

Read Joshua 4: 1-24

What does it mean?

Read verses 7-13. What was God going to accomplish through the miracle at the Jordan River?



Why was it important that Joshua be exalted in the eyes of the people at this time? (see also 4:14)

In verses 9-13, Joshua refers to God as the "Lord of all the earth" two times. Why do you think he does this?

Read the first 9 verses of Chapter 4. What was it that the Lord instructed Joshua to do and why? (see also 4:20-24)

Compare the crossing of the Jordan with that of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:1-31), What similarities are there between the two crossings?

What does it say?

Joshua 5:1-12

¹ Now when all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast heard how the LORD had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until we had crossed over, their hearts melted and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites.

² At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again." ³ So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth.

⁴ Now this is why he did so: All those who came out of Egypt -- all the men of military age -- died in the desert on the way after leaving Egypt. ⁵ All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the desert during the journey from Egypt had not. ⁶ The Israelites had moved about in the desert forty years until all the men who were of military age when they left Egypt had died, since they had not obeyed the LORD. For the LORD had sworn to them that they would not see the land that he had solemnly promised their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁷ So he raised up their sons in their place, and these were the ones Joshua circumcised. They were still uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way. ⁸ And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed.

⁹ Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." So the place has been called Gilgal to this day.

¹⁰ On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. ¹¹ The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain. ¹² The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate of the produce of Canaan.

What does it mean?

5:1-12 How did the Amorite kings respond to the news that the Lord had dried up the Jordan river?

Read 5:2-9. Why was it necessary for Joshua to have the men circumcised?



"Circumcision is the surgical removal of the foreskin of the male penis. It was instituted as a sign of the covenant God made with Abraham (see Genesis 17:10-14). It was required of every male child that was a descendant of Abraham as well as purchased slaves living among the Israelites.

Unger suggests that circumcision, "fell into disuse during the wilderness wanderings since in the wilderness the Israelites were regarded as under the temporary rejection of God, and therefore prohibited from using the sign of the covenant."

Ungers Bible Dictionary

Read Exodus 12:1-36. What was the Passover and why do you think it was celebrated here, just before going into Canaan?



***APPLICATION —
So What Does
This Mean in My
Life?***

1. Joshua was careful to obey God in every detail while conquering the land of Canaan. Careful obedience was necessary to insure Israel's success (Joshua 1:8). What motivates you to obey God? Love? Fear of punishment?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 5:7-15. What does this passage tell us about what motivated the apostle Paul?
3. Read 1 John 4:19. What does this verse tell us about what motivated the apostle John?
4. What "impossible" situation are you facing in your life right now? How can the story of the crossing of the Jordan River encourage you?
5. Think back over the past three years of your life. What has God done in your life that you would like to remember by some kind of memorial stone?