

## **Joshua Chapters 3 and 4**

### **Introduction:**

God told the people of Israel to wait three days along the shores of the Jordan River (Joshua 1 v 11). All that time, the people of Israel saw a rushing river, swollen with spring rains in early harvest time, in front of them (Joshua 3 v 15). They must have asked, “How can we ever cross this river?” It was one thing for two spies to make their way across (as had happened in Joshua 2), but here was a nation of about two million people with all their possessions – how would they make it?

At a moment like this, all the wonderful talk about living in the Promised Land would have sounded pretty hollow. There was a seemingly impossible obstacle blocking the way – how would God solve this problem? How would you have felt?

### **Crossing the Jordan (Joshua 3 v 1 to 17)**

“When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God...” (v 3): Joshua didn’t send his Army Corps of Engineers first. Instead, he sent the priests who carried the ark, which was the visible representation of God’s presence with the people. Joshua understood that crossing the Jordan was a spiritual challenge, not a feat of human engineering.

“You are to move out from your positions and follow it” (v 3): the people were to follow the ark, yet keep their distance (about 1 km) from it. Why do you think they had to keep their distance? Jesus was, figuratively speaking, going ahead of them, alone.

“Consecrate yourselves” (v 5): Because this would be a spiritual battle, Joshua required that the people undergo spiritual preparation. They were to separate themselves from common things to focus on the Lord, who would do “amazing things” (v 5) among them...

- When Joshua told the priests to stand in the river, and assured the people that the waters of the Jordan would be “cut off and stand up in a heap” (v 13), what event from Israel’s history did he remember (see Joshua 4 v 23)?
- How does this show that he meditated on God’s Word (Joshua 1 v 8)?
- As Joshua stepped out in faith, how did God encourage and reward him (v 7, 17)?

“This is how you will know that the living God is among you” (v 10): Joshua understood the way God connects events. The fact that he will act on behalf of Israel here is taken as a promise of his future blessing and victory for them.

“The water from upstream stopped flowing” (v 16): in some miraculous way God stopped the flow of the Jordan River. He may have used a natural occurrence such as an earthquake, but the timing of it was by the miraculous hand of God.

What was the key to this amazing miracle? Notice the centrality of the ‘ark of the covenant’ of the Lord. The ark is referred to 14 times in these 17 verses. This was all about the faith that Joshua, the priests, and the people of Israel had in the God they knew was present with them.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the ark; he is Immanuel, ‘God with us’ (Matthew 1 v 23). As we keep our eyes on Jesus, and follow him, the rivers of ‘impossibility’ before us will dry up...

**[MORE OVER...]**

## Memorial stones (Joshua 4 v 1 to 24)

Verse 9 has caused confusion, but the NIV translation makes it clear: “Joshua *also* set up *another* pile of twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan, at the place where the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant were standing. And they are there to this day.” So there were two sets of stones.:

*The first set of stones (v 1 to 8)* – each tribe was to send a representative to take a large stone from the middle of the dry river bed where the priests were standing by the ark, so that the stones could be set up as a memorial at their camp at Gilgal (v 20).

*The second set of stones (v 9)* – Joshua himself also set up a pile of (perhaps much larger) memorial stones in the very bed of the river Jordan, so that when the river level dropped in a season of drought, the stones could be seen and would testify of the time that God completely dried up the Jordan.

In a time of spiritual ‘drought’, we need to remember the great things God has done. We often fail in our faith because we forget the great things God has done, and the faith of our children can be weak because they have never been told how great God is, and how real is his working in our lives.

- What was the purpose of these memorials?
- How would they benefit the children, and future generations?
- Why is important to remember God’s great works?
- See Psalm 78 v 5 to 7, Psalm 103 v 2, Psalm 105 v 5 to 11.

“The priests who carried the ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything the Lord had commanded Joshua was done...” (v 10): the priests stood with the ark of the covenant for the whole time it took the nation to cross over. This visible token of God’s presence had to remain in the river throughout the entire crossing. The tribes that had agreed to settle on the east side of the Jordan (Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh) stayed on their side of the Jordan, but sent their armies over to fight for the rest of the nation, just as they had promised (v 12, 13).

“The waters of the Jordan returned to their place and ran at flood stage as before” (v 18): the manner and timing with which the Jordan returned to its natural flood flow shows that this event was supernaturally arranged by God. Gilgal (v 19) was to become Joshua’s base of operations for the conquest of the entire Promised Land. Therefore, it was appropriate that the first task at Gilgal was to set up a memorial to God’s great works.