

The Book of Joshua



Crossing the Jordan with the Ark

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Bible Study – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church – Collinsville, Illinois

Chapter Three

Preparing for the Crossing (1.1-6)

1. Joshua rises early - Setting out from Shittim (Acacia Grove)



Acacia Trees

They have been encamped here since Numbers 22. Balak hired international prophet Balaam to curse Israel, but the LORD forced him to bless them. Some Israelites joined in the sexual worship of Baal and were killed. Moses delivered his last sermon (the Book of Deuteronomy). Now Israel was ready to cross. The Hebrew word for "set out" means "pull out the tent pegs." Imagine the commotion as the people packed up their tents, gathered their flocks and herds, disassembled the tabernacle (Levites), and prepared the ark (priests). The distance from Shittim to the Jordan was 8 miles.

2. "When you see the ark of the covenant..."

What was the significance of the ark?

In the wilderness, God used the ark to direct Israel's movements.



Num. 10.35 So it was, whenever the ark set out, that Moses said: "Rise up, O LORD! Let Your enemies be scattered, And let those who hate You flee before You." ³⁶ And when it rested, he said: "Return, O LORD, To the many thousands of Israel."

John 1.14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

In His earthly ministry Jesus was the visible presence of God. In His means of grace, Word and Sacrament, Jesus continues to be present with us. The ark brought both judgment and salvation as do the means of grace. They are not a talisman that can be used in whatever way we want (see 1 Sam 4-6 Ichabod). They are not to be used *ex opera operato*.

3. 2,000 Cubits This distance was probably established so that Israel could see the ark and follow it without scattering in different directions. Later, the Rabbis would use this distance (about a half a mile) as the "legal" Sabbath Day's journey (Exodus 16.29; Acts 1.12).

4. Miracles The LORD called the ten plagues "miracles" (Exo 3.10). The Messiah Himself was a "miracle" according to Isaiah 9.6.

How might Joshua 3.4 be seen as a good verse for those about to enter upon a new venture: Relocation, new job, new relationship, etc.?

We seek the LORD, His strength, the guidance of His Word, and His presence. We cast all our anxiety on Him.

Crossing the Jordan (3.7-17)

5. **The Jordan** The name comes from the Hebrew word “to go down.” It drops from the base of Mt. Hermon to the Dead Sea 2,600 feet. Long ago its banks were thick with growth. Lions and other animals lived in it’s jungles. (Important events at the Jordan: Jacob crossed in Genesis 32; Elijah was taken to heaven here; Elisha divided the waters with the mantle of Elijah; Naaman the Syrian was healed; Jesus was baptized.) Today the Jordan has less water because much of its tributaries are diverted for irrigation.



The Jordan at Jericho

6. **The River** Eden was watered with a special river. Ezekiel saw a vision of a river that flowed from the temple to the Dead Sea and brought it to life. John’s Revelation tells of a river that flows from the throne of God and from the Lamb providing water for the Tree of Life. (Great Hymns: *Shall We Gather at the River, Guide Me Oh, Thou Great Jehovah, Art Thou Weary, Art Thou Troubled, Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.*)

7. **Joshua** We see this repeated throughout Joshua: The LORD commands Joshua; Joshua commands Israel; Israel obeys. The LORD is careful to show that Joshua is the legitimate leader of Israel.
8. **The Seven Nations of Canaan** – Paul mentions them in Acts 13.19 as He overviews the history of Israel culminating in the incarnation of Jesus.

Replacement Theology – This is the way we are sometimes described. The idea is that we have replaced Israel with the church. This is an incorrect description of our theology.

Fulfillment Theology – This is a better description of our understanding of Israel. Jesus is our Sabbath. Jesus is our sacrifice. Jesus is our Temple. Jesus is our “promised land.” 2 Corinthians 1.20 “For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.” Israel still retains an important role in God’s plan of salvation. But that role is fulfilled in Jesus.

In Genesis 15.16 the LORD told Abram that the iniquity of the Amorites is not complete. This iniquity included: consulting the dead, casting spells, sacrificing children, cultic prostitution, homosexuality, and bestiality. He told Moses that they would be driven out because of these practices (Deut. 18.12). Canaan is the son of Ham, son of Noah. In Genesis 9.25 Noah cursed Canaan and prophesied the wickedness of his descendents and their judgment.

9. **Jordan Cut Off** – The city of Adam is 17 miles upstream. In the first month of Abib (Spring), the water would have been flowing high.
10. **The Dead Sea** – The lowest place on earth (1300 feet below sea level). The Sea is another 1300 feet deep, 50 miles long, and 11 miles wide. It is 7 times saltier than the ocean. Swimmers cannot sink in it.
11. **Reasons to Believe this Miracle** – The Jordan River has been stopped three times by landslides in 1267, 1906 and 1921. Was this really a miracle?

1. The miracle was predicted (3.5).
2. Split-second timing linked the feet of the priests with the heaping up of the waters.
3. Occurred at the Jordan's highest water level
4. Israel would not have exalted Joshua for a landslide.

Why do you think it was important that "all Israel" crossed over?