

¹ Then Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim. And they came to the Jordan, he and all the people of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. Joshua 3:1 While the spies were hiding in the hills to west of Jericho, the camp of Israel moved to the edge of the Jordan and prepared to cross (if the three days of hiding corresponds to the three days the officers waited to go through the camp). Joshua was up early the morning they were to move. No doubt he was full of anticipation and maybe a bit nervous. The Jordan is at flood stage and the imposing walls of Jericho could be seen in the distance. But the promises of God to give them the land have led to this point. He told the people the last time they came to this spot that the Lord was surely able to give them the land. Now here they are again, but Moses is dead. However, the God of Moses is not dead. He is the One who directed Moses and gave them victories.

² At the end of three days the officers went through the camp ³ and commanded the people, "As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it. ⁴ Yet there shall be a distance between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in length. Do not come near it, in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before." Joshua 3:2-4 It was time to move out. The people had heard the promises and knew of their parents' failures. By now they had the encouraging word from the returning spies. But they could see what Joshua saw. In front of them was a raging river at least ten feet deep, and with them are children and flocks. Now the moment has come. What would happen? What would God do?

The officers informed the people to follow the ark of the covenant. The excitement must have been tangible. They were to keep a safe distance of 3000 feet behind it. The ark was the symbol of the presence of God with them. They had never come this way before. Those who dared to try to go in without God died in the wilderness. But now God goes before them just as He has all the way through the wilderness as a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night.

This is a lesson to us on how God builds our faith. He puts us in impossible situations and tells us to go forward. He assures us that He is with us (Matthew 28:20ⁱ). All we need to do is follow Him like they followed the ark. The big difference is that while we revere His holiness, we are invited to draw near (Hebrews 4:16ⁱⁱ). We don't need to stay at a distance. Jesus' righteousness covers us as we approach God.

We have no idea how He will see us through or what He will do in the process. We just have to have faith and obey (Isaiah 50:10ⁱⁱⁱ). And when we do, we often find this way we have never been before turns out in ways we could never have imagined. When we walk by faith instead of by sight, we then see the wonders of God (2 Corinthians 5:7^{iv}). It is uncomfortable as we begin, but looking back, we see God has gone before us and made a way.

It is not our role to second-guess what God will do, any more than it is to argue about how he could possibly do it. We have to follow. Faith gathers up all our cares and anxieties in the knowledge that He has taken the responsibility for our future and every step ahead of us. Faith leaves it all with God (see Psalm 55:22; 1 Peter 5:7).^v

As soon as they cross the Jordan, everything will change. The cloud will be gone. The manna will stop falling. They will be in the Promised Land and it will supply their needs. But one thing will not have changed. They are still following the LORD, now represented by the ark of the covenant.

⁵ Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you." Joshua 3:5 The day before the departure they were to consecrate themselves, which meant to wash their clothing and prepare their hearts (Exodus 19:10^{vi}). This was what their parents did when they made a covenant with God on Sinai. This was a careful and deliberate preparation for a profound moment in the history of the nation. The promise to Abraham was about to take a step toward fulfillment. God was about to do something they would never forget, and they needed to be ready to take it in.

In Kent Hughes book on the Disciplines of a Godly man, he suggests that we do a similar kind of preparation for our time of worship together on Sunday. He suggests that we do all the preparation the night before, such as laying out our clothes and getting to bed on time so we will not be rushed in the morning. I would also suggest reading the passage for that Sunday if you are aware of it. Then come that morning with an expectation to encounter God in His Word. Prepare your heart beforehand with prayer. If we want to see His wonders, we need to consecrate ourselves beforehand lest we take the wonders of God lightly or miss them altogether.

⁶ And Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on before the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people. Joshua 3:6 The time had come. The priests put their shoulders under the rods that carried the ark and began to move out. They were acting in faith that God did speak to Joshua, as we will see in the following verses. They were about to carry the ark into a flood, but they obeyed. The people could see that God was going before them to make a way through the Jordan.

As the Jordan is a picture of death, we should realize that our Savior has gone before us to make a way through death. He crossed over and rose victorious. Because He lives, we will live also (John 14:19^{vii}). When our day comes to cross the Jordan, we can cross over without fear for God has gone before us and made a way (John 14:6^{viii}).

⁷ The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you." Joshua 3:7 Verses 7 through 13 appear to be God's instructions to Joshua and Joshua passing on those instructions to the people. God's purpose in bringing them to the Jordan during the annual flood was to help them place their faith in Joshua like they had trusted in Moses. Did he hear from God as Moses did? Was his leading at the command of God? This

miracle would put an end to those questions and give them faith to obey him in the upcoming battles.

We need to understand that Joshua was a foreshadow of Jesus. These divinely appointed and anointed leaders in the Old Testament, such as kings and prophets, had the Spirit of God come upon them for their ministry. People were to obey them without question unless they were encouraging the worship of other gods. The change that came about in the New Testament is that every child of God has the Spirit within them

The wisdom of God in the New Testament instructs us to have multiple elders rather than a single leader (Titus 1:5^{ix}). They consult God's Word, listen to one another and pray over issues. They keep one another accountable. They support one another through difficulties and share the burden of watching over the flock. It keeps a sincere godly leader from burning out. They have a diversity of gifts. Hebrews 13:17^x tells us to submit to their leadership. But we also have the injunction that we ought to obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29^{xi}). We each have the Spirit of God in us and the Word of God in our hands. Our Joshua is Jesus and He alone is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22^{xii}).

⁸ And as for you, command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the brink of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'"

⁹ And Joshua said to the people of Israel, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God." ¹⁰ And Joshua said, "Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites.

Joshua 3:8-10 God gave Joshua specific instructions for the priests and for the people. The priests were to carry the ark into the Jordan and stand still. Since the people could only come within 3000 foot of the ark, the priests would have been upstream over half a mile from the people.

Then Joshua called the people to listen to the words of the Lord. That is what we do every time we open the Bible. God's instructions were to serve the explicit purpose of assuring them that God was with them to drive out the nations that lived in the Promised Land.

The spiritual parallel is that the miracle God did in saving our souls is a sign to you that He goes before you to drive out all the obstacles that keep you from entering into kingdom living: impure thoughts, fear, the patterns of pleasure in sin, and the selfish way we lived our lives. These are our flood waters. They are also the enemies in our land, and they look too powerful for us to overcome, but God goes before us. He is the One who will rewire our thought life if we will follow Him and live in His Word (Romans 12:2^{xiii}). He will replace our destructive temporal pleasures with greater and more fulfilling and lasting ones. He will be the spirit of selflessness in us as we surrender our will to His. He goes before us, brothers and sisters. We do make an effort to see these changes come about in our mind and heart (2 Peter 1:5^{xiv}), but it is by His enabling power and grace that dries up our Jordan.

¹¹ Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. ¹² Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man. ¹³ And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap.” Joshua 3:11-13 Surely God had explained all this to Joshua, so what we have in verses 7 and 8 are just summary of what God said. Now we have the details. They were to appoint a man from each tribe. We will see the purpose in the following verses. When the priests' feet touched the Jordan River, God would cause the water to stop flowing and pile up. It was as if a giant invisible hand was going to come down and make an enormous dam.

Think of the faith it took Joshua to declare that to the people! If the soles of the priest's feet touched the water and nothing happened, what do you think they would have done to Joshua? Joshua told the people what God commanded him to say, so the burden is not on Joshua but on God. The same is true when we believe the Word of God.

A problem we have in this age is people speaking for God things that never come about. They say, "God told me to tell you so and so ..." When it doesn't happen, they do not reevaluate their ability to hear and discern the voice of God, they just carry on as if God goofed. God doesn't promise and then fail to fulfill. Compare these proclamations from people to the Word of God and the sense the Holy Spirit gives you in your spirit. If you are living in the Spirit and know God's Word, you will have an immediate sense whether or not the person is in tune with God.

¹⁴ So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, ¹⁵ and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), ¹⁶ the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. Joshua 3:14-16 Faith and obedience will overcome any obstacle no matter how great. Can you see the priests with the ark approaching the banks of the river now flooding the plain? I live on a creek that has steep banks, so I always imagined them stepping off an embankment. Recently we discovered where the excavation for Bethsaida was on the north shore of Galilee. We took a group there in the springtime, but it was impossible to approach because the Jordan had overflowed its banks into the surrounding farmland making the approach a mud bog. That gave me a clearer picture of what it would have been like. They would have been stepping into shallow muddy water first and then come to the main channel. But as soon as the soles of their feet touched the water, the Jordan stopped flowing. What is just as amazing is that in the next verse we read the ground was dry!

The nation had heard of the amazing crossing of the Red Sea. Moses had stretched out his staff and the sea parted, and the people went across on dry ground. If there was any miracle that would have helped people see that God was with Joshua like he was with Moses, the parting of the water was it! The invisible hand of God came down and made a dam near a city called Adam. God has a sense of humor: A-dam!

¹⁷ Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan. Joshua 3:17 The priests stood there in the middle of the riverbed until the whole nation passed over. That was another act of faith. It would have taken all day for the nation to cross over with their children and herds.

One day the creek we live on was at flood stage. We heard a great roar and the ground shook. Our neighbor on the creek called and said the flood was almost up to his window. A landslide had instantly created a dam. The creek below stopped flowing. But once the water began to break through, that pent up water became a flashflood. When the ocean shore or a water way goes dry, run the other way. It will come back with a vengeance. The Israelites knew this as they had surely seen flashfloods in the wadis of the wilderness they lived in for the past 40 years.

I think the priests felt perfectly safe because they were with the ark of the covenant. They were with the object where the presence of God manifested Himself. They had seen His wonders and knew He was indeed God in heaven above and earth below (Joshua 2:11^{xv}). They were in the safest place in all the world.

The entire nation passed over to the side where the city of Jericho was. The manna would now stop. The cloud that led them now lifted. They were home. Well, they were almost home. There was a little matter of the nations still in their land. But if God can stop a flooding river, what are the armies of man? The wonder of the miracle would stay with them the rest of their lives. If their fathers were baptized into Moses in the Red Sea, they were now baptized into Joshua in the Jordan (1 Corinthians 10:1,2^{xvi}).

It is tempting to take this account and draw a sweeping conclusion that God will remove every obstacle in our way. But that is a self-centered application that is not consistent with the whole account. What is clear is that God keeps His promises. **Nothing can stop His Word from being fulfilled**, for it was by His Word that all things were created (Psalm 33:9^{xvii}). The Israelites had faced many problems in the wilderness, some were the consequences of their sins, and others came from the sins of other nations. Nevertheless, God has kept His promise to bring them into the land. They will face many more problems in the conquest for the same reasons. But God is with them. And through them, God was bringing His Word into the world, both the written and incarnate Word. He was constantly pointing to the coming Messiah through their history. In the end, we will find it was all about Jesus and the glory of God (Luke 24:27^{xviii}).

It is Jesus who stood in the Jordan, the symbol of death, so that we might enter the promised land of the kingdom of God, not someday when we die, but right now (Romans 8:11^{xix}). He stopped the flood of our fallen nature by His grace and invited us in

(Ephesians 2:8,9^{xx}). We have received the Spirit but still our flesh is at war with our spirit, and we have much land to conquer (Galatians 5:17^{xxi}). But if we will take the key principle here, which is to trust God and His promises, then we will find He leads us to many victories and provides our needs as well. We will conquer spiritual land that we will leave as a heritage for our children, for the miracle working God who stopped the Jordan is working in our lives as well, bringing us into our promised land of life in Christ. The Apostle Paul tells us that He who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete it (Philippians 1:6^{xxii}). Our lives will be increasingly conformed into the likeness of Jesus (Romans 8:29^{xxiii}), and point others to our Savior. We will find it was all for the glory of our great God.

Questions:

- 1 How daunting was the command from God?
- 2 What lesson should we learn from that?
- 3 Why is the Jackman quote a struggle to live out?
- 4 What was the purpose of God's command?
- 5 Would you have told the people what God told Joshua?
- 6 What was as big a miracle as the water stopping?
- 7 Why would it still take faith to cross?
- 8 What was their assurance?
- 9 Does God remove all our obstacles?
- 10 Who stopped our flood? Is He your assurance of everlasting life?

ⁱ **Matthew 28:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

ⁱⁱ **Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Isaiah 50:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.

^{iv} **2 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)**

⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight.

^v Jackman, David, *Preaching the Word - Joshua: People of God's Purpose*.

^{vi} **Exodus 19:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments

^{vii} **John 14:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.

^{viii} **John 14:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

^{ix} **Titus 1:5 (ESV)**

⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—

^x **Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

^{xi} **Acts 5:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.

^{xii} **Ephesians 1:22 (ESV)**

²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,

^{xiii} **Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

^{xiv} **2 Peter 1:5 (ESV)**

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge,

^{xv} **Joshua 2:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

^{xvi} **1 Corinthians 10:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea,

² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,

^{xvii} **Psalms 33:9 (ESV)**

⁹ For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

^{xviii} **Luke 24:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

^{xix} **Romans 8:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

^{xx} **Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

^{xxi} **Galatians 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

^{xxii} **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

^{xxiii} **Romans 8:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.