

Introduction: crossing over from death to life.

Recap: Last week we learned of Rahab—a victim of a godless pagan culture—a sinner and a fem fatale who risked much to hide the spies and was saved by her faithful obedience.

This week we are going to look at the actual crossing of the Jordan. Joshua's calling and election as Moses' successor is crystalized in this passage, and the spy mission confirms that now is the time to strike.

Scripture: Joshua 3

Transition: Today we'll see how God gets the people from where they are to where they need to be. Joshua 3-5 will show us that God is King, God is present, and the people of God are peculiar.

Ok hold on here, we're going to do a little homework through the text first, then we'll dive deep then come back up for air in a few minutes and reflect on this for the Christian life.

1. God gives Israel a miracle—the parting of the Jordan. In so many ways this story is the sequel to the Exodus of Egypt—many repeated patterns—a continuation of the story arc developed in the Exodus.

- **The people camped and waited (3:1)**—this statement cannot be overlooked. They have been waiting for two generations for this miracle for this promise. But they must wait 3 more days. If humility is the king of all virtues, then patience is its queen. Have you ever taken a trip with kids and they were patient right up until the very last leg of the journey—and then they start to lose it! Often it's that last 3 days, that last 100 feet to the finish line that can finish us.
- **The soldiers commanded them to follow (3:2)**—“when you see the ark, then follow it at a distance.”
 - **The ark symbolized God's kindness and His presence.** Not an idol—but a symbol of *chesed* God's loving-kindness demonstrated by his presence in their midst.
 - **The ark symbolized God's Kingly position.** Kings would go out before their people being carried on a similar cart by their military warlords and surrounded by their priests. That's almost exactly what we see with the ark of the covenant—a ritual box containing the staff of Moses and tablets of Law—as well as the books of Moses. The ark is a reminder that your King is God alone—you have no King but Yahweh—unlike the heathen states.
 - **The ark was an interface for worship**—on the Day of Atonement a pure goat was sacrificed and the blood was splattered on the lid—the mercy seat of that ark—referred to as a *hilasterion*—*the place where atonement is made*. In the NT, the *hilasterion* is the hill where atonement is made once and for all for the sins of humanity. The ark was an interface—a place, like the temple, like the tabernacle, and now in the NT—the gathered Church—where the omni-present-God becomes manifest and interfaces with humanity.

- **Joshua consecrated them to the LORD (3:5)**—“consecrate yourselves today because tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.” Consecration precedent was set with Moses who commanded the people to be set apart—devoted to the Lord.
- **God confirms with a sign (3:9-13)**—when you stand in the water the Jordan will be held back and you will cross over on dry ground.
- **God confronts the first god of Canaan culture—the river!** Rivers were “regarded as divine in both Egypt and Mesopotamia. Later treaty curses in Assyria describe how the gods can make the rivers reverse direction and cease to supply water. In Babylon, the chief god Marduk was responsible for maintaining the flow of rivers. Here God’s control of the Jordan River, in contrast to that of the gods of Canaan, is asserted.”

God’s first military victory is over the Jordan River—it’s a significant victory. When the inhabitants of Canaan find out by rumor and report that the Israelite people escaped Egypt by a parting of the Yam Suph—the great reed sea and when word gets around that this generation of Israelites have come into the land by the dividing and parting of the Jordan at flood stage—they are struck with terror. The gods they thought controlled the flow—the rising and falling of the rivers—is actually not powerful enough to stop the “god” of the Hebrews. This assuredly would have been seen as a first military victory—and not a single sword is drawn.

“Adam was a traditional crossing point of the Jordan River. Close to where the Jabbok River joins from the east and the Wadi el-fara from the west, the site marks the spot where the southerly flow of the Jordan River becomes more difficult to cross. About 30% of the Jordan Valley is affected by the shutting off of the Jabbok valves.”

Now some scholars have pointed out that there have been regular natural damming at this very point with the high banks and the tectonic shifting—causing rock and earth slides damming up the Jordan.

But the miracle here isn’t just the fact that God sent a mild earthquake or an angel—we’re not told *how God stopped the river*—but notice the river stops right on cue—the moment the priests carrying God’s kingly ark step into the Jordan. And notice it doesn’t begin to flow again until all the people pass through, and Moses commands the priests to come up out of the Jordan with the cart.

- God is *el hayyiq*—the living God
- God is Yahweh *elohinu*—the LORD your God. Yahweh means the one who is.

Application:

- **Their access was limited and ours isn’t.** We now longer, as the people of God, follow at a distance for Jesus has given us access to God the Father, and are now a holy temple—a sacred dwelling in whom the Holy Spirit of God resides. **Eph. 2:18-22 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on**

the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

- **They were ritually consecrated and we are spiritually sanctified in Christ.** They consecrated themselves in many ways—usually in the form of rituals—but now in the New Testament age we are being sanctified—consecrated to God by the Holy Spirit. **Heb. 9, 13 both state** that the blood of bulls and goats could never permanently cover or atone for sin—but, the author says, that Jesus has made atonement for us by the shedding of his own blood. And now believers are being sanctified, set apart for God by God’s truth (John. 17:17; Eph. 5:26).

Summary: The people follow and pass over the Jordan. The Priests have the ark which goes before them, is in the midst of them, and follows behind them. A symbol of God’s presence, his kingly rule among them and an interface—an overlap point between the Kingdom of Heaven and earth—where God manifests his presence and accepts their atonement sacrifices. The people follow God into battle and God defeats the first idol of Canaan culture—the great river—showing the he alone is the living God and their very sustenance.

2. God gives his people a memorial—the twelve stones.

- **It was a symbol of their unity (4:1-3).** United tribes. Diffusion and division was a constant threat to the people—in fact later in their history the 12 tribes will undergo a civil war and the country will split between the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. But God must begin the fledgling nation in unity—everyone on the same page. Why is disunity so destructive to a church? The NT authors are big on this.
- **It was a symbol of God’s supremacy (4:24).** In the 13th century BC, this kind of procession with the setting up of a stone altar was quite common, as illustrated in the multiple processions of the Canaanite fertility god Dagon—who was also thought to be a god of war. These processions with the priests of the cult would be finalized with a stone altar declaring that local war-god to be superior. This Jordan procession would have communicated to the surrounding territories that Yahweh was the true warrior God—and not only had he led his people in a procession—but miraculously across the Jordan in a harvest season when the river is raging 100 ft wide and 10 ft. deep. The 12 stone altar would have been cultural code for “you’re next.”
- **It was a reminder of their victory (4:6-7).** They were to use it as a sign to teach their children and to remind them of God’s power on their behalf.

Summary: All along the way, God has provided significant mnemonic devices—reminders of their covenant and their experience with God.

Story: Maybe you heard about a guy named John who had a really horrible memory. One day John ran into a friend whom he had not seen in a long time. He greeted him and said, “Bill, do you

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remember what a bad memory I had?” Bill answered, “Yes, I certainly do.” “Well, it’s not bad any more. I went to a seminar that taught us how to remember things. It was a great seminar, and now I have a wonderful memory.”

Bill answered, “That’s great! What was the name of the seminar?” “Well,” John said, “wait a minute, my wife went with me. I’ll ask her.” He turned and saw his wife nearby. Then he turned back to Bill and said, “What’s the name of that flower with a long stem and thorns and a red bloom?” “Do you mean a rose?” Bill answered, “Yeah, thanks,” John said, “Hey, Rose, what’s the name of that seminar we attended?”

People leak. We forget. God knows we’re prone to forgetting all that he has done. In Dt. 6:12 Moses urged Israel to “be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”

Application:

- **Remember the price.** We remember what Christ has done for us in his crucifixion and resurrection. **2 Tim. 2:8** “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel”
1 Cor. 15:1 “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand”
- **Remember your past.** We remember what we were and what God has made us. **Eph. 2:12-13** “remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Illus. My old Bibles and journals—they remind me of significant eras of my life. They remind me of the spiritual journey with Christ that I’ve been on ever since I cannon balled into that baptism take and shook up that fundamentalist Baptist church one Sunday evening.

They remind me of faithfulness and are in many ways a snapshot of my Christian walk at that time.

But now I have new Bibles and new journals. Because God is writing a new chapters in my story with him. God is doing new miracles, leading me to cross some different rivers and take some new hills—and the new stuff looks remarkably like the old stuff. The new tests are strangely similar to the old ones—they’re just repackaged for a new season.

And here’s the lesson—here’s what they all testify to—I didn’t cross from death to life in my own effort because a lightening bolt of creativity struck and I got a wild hair to become a Christian. I didn’t leave my life of sin behind and pursue of life of godliness and sanctification in the Word because of my own

effort—I'm here because of all that Jesus has done in my life—and nothing else.

My encouragement to you is to be reminded of the victories of God over sin and in your life.

Just as God commanded Joshua to set up a memorial—a proclamation of his victory over the gods of fertility and the Jordan—just as God commanded them to teach them and to pass them on to their children—you too create some family reminders—some milestones of God's incontrovertible faithfulness to you. Embed those stories of God's faithfulness in their little minds.

Do you have a family landmark? A family memorial? Something that reminds you of God's faithfulness in the past and inspires your faith for future challenges?

I love sharing my story of salvation with my boys and my little girl. I love to tell them what it was like back then in the 70's and 80's when there were no smart phones, no ipods, no CD or blue ray players, few personal computers and the ones we had were laughable compared to the computing power of a mere smart watch.

If you wanted to listen to music you had to put in an 8-track or a cassette tape—if you wanted to go the next song you had to hit the fast forward button and wait for the tape to advance—if you wanted to watch a movie you had to go to an actual theater or maybe visit a friend whose dad splurged like 2000 dollars on something called a VHS player.

I know I'm a fossil in their eyes. An old toot who isn't quite as savvy with all their networked, plugged in, touch screen worlds—but I love to take them back to that moment in a little room in VA when the weight of my sin was too much to bear and the power of the Holy Spirit washed over me—cleansing me to the core while hot blistering tears streamed down my face.

I love to tell them the story of the day at youth camp when I gave it all to Jesus and dedicated the entirety of my life to him—consecrating myself to Jesus today—not knowing what miracles and wonders he would accomplish in my life going forward.

This children, is how I got from there to here—and this is how you will get from here to where God wants you.

Takeaways

Step 1 Consecrate yourselves today because tomorrow God will do wonders in your life.

Step 2 Say no to false gods of pleasure and power who vie for the helm of your life.

Step 3 Worship the Lord your God in Christ—and serve him only!

Step 4 Remember and repeat steps 1-3