

Message #6**Joshua 3:1-17**

Would you get into a jet and allow someone who had no respect for that jet or the laws and rules of aviation to fly you up into the sky and to your destination? Would you allow a doctor to operate on you who was not meticulous in his knowledge of all physiological and medical issues pertaining to your situation? Of course you wouldn't. If you did the outcome would be catastrophic.

There are many people who allow a minister in the church who does not have a deep respect and reverence for the Word of God and it is catastrophic. It happens every week. People's eternal lives are on the line and they just willingly walk into various places of worship even though the leadership doesn't place much emphasis on reverencing and understanding and applying the written Scriptures.

As we come to this part of the book of Joshua, it is time for Israel to move forward with the presence of God and the blessings of God. It is time for Israel to cross the Jordan and start taking the land. **God wants Israel to realize in order to move forward you will always need to have a deep reverence and respect for My Word and a passion to follow My Word.**

When we come to this third chapter of Joshua, it is very evident that in order to cross the Jordan and have the presence of God, there needed to be a reverence and commitment to follow **“the ark of the covenant.”**

The Ark of the Covenant was basically a chest that contained two tablets of stone on which God wrote His commandments. This was God's written Word for Israel and it represented God's written covenant with Israel (Ex. 25:16, 22; 40:20). This ark is referred to some ten times in these 17 verses (3:3, 6(2x); 8, 11, 13, 14, 15(2x), 17). **This ark contained the written Word of God and it represented the presence and power of God.**

TO MOVE FORWARD FOR GOD IN A WAY THAT ACTUALLY HAS THE POWER AND BLESSINGS OF GOD, ONE MUST HAVE A GREAT REVERENCE FOR THE WORD OF GOD AND A COMMITMENT TO FOLLOW THE WORD OF GOD.

This is precisely what Israel did not have nearly 40 years before this moment. She was not serious about believing and obeying the Word of God and, as a result, she wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Now it was time for her to get real serious about God's Word. Israel was to follow God's Word from the worldly side of the Jordan to the heavenly side of the Jordan.

People who move forward love and reverence God's Word. Martin Luther said, “Oh! How great and glorious a thing it is to have before one the Word of God! With that we may at all times feel joyous and secure; we need never be in want of consolation, for we see before us, in all its brightness, the pure right way. He who loses sight of the Word of God falls into despair, the voice of heaven no longer sustains him; he follows only the disorderly tendency of his heart and of world vanity, which lead him on to his destruction.”

Joshua is a godly leader. He is going to refocus Israel's attention on reverencing the Word of God.

Now there are some key observations we want to make from this important chapter. This starts everything:

OBSERVATION #1 – Joshua began early in the morning. **3:1a**

Joshua was a man who got things done for God. One of the things that comes out about him in this book is that Joshua was a man who habitually got up early in the morning (6:12; 7:16; 8:10).

To get things done for God, you must get up and get at it. Once Joshua learned from the spies what they had reported, he did not waste time. He got up early and he got everyone else up early to get moving.

OBSERVATION #2 – Joshua led Israel to move from Shittim to the Jordan. **3:1b**

The distance from Shittim to the banks of the Jordan is about seven miles. Joshua got up early and he got all the sons of Israel to move those seven miles. The logistics of this move would probably take several hours.

OBSERVATION #3 – Israel camped on the banks of the Jordan for three days. **3:1c-2a**

When Israel got to the banks of the Jordan, they set up a camp. According to **verse 15**, the water level was very high and for three days they sat there wondering how in the world they were ever going to cross this river.

Now we do not think it is a coincidence that God has them there for three days. This is clearly a typological chronology of the three days Jesus Christ would spend in the grave that would make all of the promises possible. Israel could not cross this river on her own; she needed Divine help and the One who could and would help her was Jesus Christ.

There is an overflowing river of sin that prevents us from crossing into a relationship with God and going to heaven. We, too, need Divine help and there is One who can give us that help who was in a grave for three days, and that One is Jesus Christ.

OBSERVATION #4 – Israel's officers command the people to carefully follow the Word. **3:2-4**

At the end of three days, the leaders went through the camp and commanded the people to follow the Levitical priests when they moved the ark of the covenant. Dr. Woodstra says the ark "dominates the entire account of the crossing" (*Joshua*, p. 80).

The people were to move forward by carefully reverencing and following God's Word.

When the priests moved, they were to follow. But notice carefully they were to keep their distance. According to **verse 4** they were to keep a distance of 2000 cubits.

Now a cubit is about 18 inches, so 2000 cubits is a distance of 36,000 inches, which is 3000 feet, which is 1000 yards, which is about $\frac{3}{4}$'s of a mile.

Now the point of this is if you are going to accomplish this, you need to have a deep respect and reverence for God and His Word. People who actually receive God's presence and blessings always have a reverence for God and His Word.

If you want to be led into the real work and blessings of God, you must be connected to a church that has a deep reverence for God and His Word.

OBSERVATION #5 – Joshua instructs the people and the priests. **3:5-6**

It is clear from this text that these people not only needed a great reverence for the Word, but they needed a leader to communicate to them what to do. These people were not going to get across this Jordan without Joshua. He is the God-ordained leader and they needed to follow what he said.

Area of Instruction #1 - Joshua spoke to the people. **3:5**

Joshua told the people to “consecrate” themselves. That word “consecrate” means to make yourself clean and pure for holy and sacred use (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 725). Under Moses this meant to wash one's clothes and refrain from any sexual activity (Ex. 19:14-15).

The point Joshua is making here is that before one can move forward and receive the blessings of God, one must be clean and pure.

There is no getting around this point in any dispensation. If people consecrate themselves and are serious about the Word of God, they will see God do some amazing things. God demands people to be clean and pure before He will shower them with His full blessings.

Area of Instruction #2 - Joshua spoke to the priests. **3:6**

The Levitical priests were responsible for carrying this ark, which contained the sacred written Word of God (**3:3**, 8:33). These priests were to carefully handle the Word of God and lead the people deep into the Promised Land and deep into the blessings of God.

This is what is needed for people to go deep into the blessings of God—it needs leaders who realize the importance of the sacred Scriptures.

Now Joshua told them to take the ark and cross in front of the people and go ahead of them. These leaders are not told how they will cross the Jordan, they are simply told cross it. Sometimes leaders must by faith step into deep water in order to see God do great things. Sometimes leaders must lay it all on the line in order for the people to see God work. God often waits for leaders to step out in faith before He does the dramatic. These leaders needed to be very serious about God's Word and needed to show the people that they had a reverence for it. The leaders who can take you deep into the blessings of God are those who reverence the Word of God and take you to a deep understanding of it.

OBSERVATION #6 – God speaks to Joshua. **3:7-8**

Now to this point, Joshua has been operating with a serious focus on God and His Word and as he was doing that, God spoke to him.

Message #1 - God informed Joshua that He would exalt him. **3:7**

God informed Joshua that He was going to exalt Joshua to the point that the entire nation would know God was with Joshua like He had been with Moses. God would do a powerful work with Joshua just like He did with Moses. In fact, literally there was about to be another water parting.

Message #2 - God informed Joshua what to command the priests to do. **3:8**

God told Joshua to tell the priests to take the Ark of the Covenant and go to the Jordan and stand in the water. They were to go to the edge of the Jordan River and then stand in the river.

OBSERVATION #7 – Joshua speaks the Word of God to the people. **3:9-13**

According to **verse 9**, Joshua gathered the people together to “hear the words of the LORD your God.” He communicates five amazing messages to Israel:

Message #1 - What is about to happen will show you the living God is among you. **3:10a**

This is so important for God's people to know. We have with us a living God, not a dead God.

Message #2 - What is about to happen will show you He will give you victory over enemies. **3:10b**

Now there is quite a list of enemies mentioned here. In fact, you will notice that there are seven groups of people named here. Probably this is a symbolic number that specifically indicates a complete conquering of the Promised Land including all geographical areas of it.

The Canaanites specifically lived by the sea (5:1). The Hittites lived in the southern part of the Promised Land (1:4). The Hivites lived in the central part near Gibeon (11:19). The Perizzites lived in the forest areas of the central part of the land (17:15).

The Gergashites lived in the northern part near the Sea of Galilee. The Amorites lived in the mountain regions of the land to the north (11:3) and the Jebusites live in the mountain regions of the south (15:8).

God wanted every one of these nations exterminated. They were God-mocking, evil nations. God never wipes out a nation until iniquity has reached a horrible level. In fact, back in the book of Genesis, God told Abraham that the Amorites, who are named in this very verse, would not be destroyed until the fourth generation from Abraham when iniquity had reached a complete level (Gen. 15:16). Well this was the fourth generation from Abraham and it was now time for Israel to take this land.

This crossing of the Jordan would have a profound effect on these nations (5:1).

Message #3 - God requires the Ark of the Covenant crosses the Jordan ahead of you. **3:11**

The Word of God is the most important thing here. You must never get ahead of the Word of God.

Message #4 - One man from each tribe was to be selected. **3:12**

We are not told what their job would be, but we learn later. These twelve men would have a job to do once the Jordan had been crossed (4:3-4, 9).

Message #5 - God will part the Jordan when the feet of the priests are in the water. **3:13**

God could part the Jordan without these priests, but they could not part the Jordan without God. The fact is the living God has decided to use people to accomplish His purposes.

God would not part the Jordan until the soles of the feet of the priests were in that water. These priests could not be prima donnas who were afraid to get their feet wet. They needed to get into the Jordan.

OBSERVATION #8 – Israel crosses the Jordan. **3:14-17**

The people started following the priests, who were carrying the Word of God, and they came to the Jordan and put their feet into it; the Jordan stopped flowing.

It is speculated that the city of Adam, beside Zarethan, was located anywhere from 16 to 36 miles north of Jericho.

The waters bunched up and the people crossed on dry land. Now each of the 2 ½ million people who cross the Jordan here must walk right by the Ark of the Covenant. Each one saw the importance of God and His Word.

The power we need to cross over into a relationship with God is Jesus Christ.