

Joshua

Lesson 3

Chapter 3

How often do you think about real miracles in your life? For the Nation of Israel, they had experienced incredible miracles in their last months in Egypt. Then they experience a huge miracle with the parting of the Red Sea. Then there were the daily miracles for forty years in water flowing from the rock with no known source at Rephidim, and then the manna for food every day. Real miracles. In this lesson, we will see another real miracle in the lives of the people of Israel. Those who were twenty years of age and younger when they came out of Egypt will see this kind of miracle for the second time. For those who had been born in the last forty years, they will be witnessing the miracle for the first time. In either case, it is a wonderful miracle that only the LORD God could do.

II. The Great Campaign of Joshua's Command (3:1–22:34)

A. The Crossing of the Jordan River (3:1-5:15)

1. The Assembly to Cross Over (3:1)

In Joshua chapters 1 and 2, we discovered the great beginning of Joshua's command. Now we come to the largest section of the book, which we will call the great campaign of Joshua's command. We begin with the assembly to cross over on the bank of the Jordan River. Chapter 3, verse 1.

"Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and he and all the sons of Israel set out from Shittim and came to the Jordan, and they lodged there before they crossed." (3:1).

As we mentioned in the last chapter, the LORD spoke to Joshua at the turn of the day of Nisan the 7th and told him to *"arise and cross the Jordan."* Joshua immediately sent the two spies to Jericho that night. The next morning, which is still the 7th of Nisan on the Jewish calendar, the camp packed their bags and moved about five miles from Shittim, the meadow of acacia trees, down to the bank of the Jordan River where the people would wait in their tents until the return of the spies. However, the LORD had already told Joshua, and Joshua had told the people they would cross within three days.

2. The Instruction to Cross Over

On the third day after moving the camp to the bank of the Jordan River, Joshua gave the instruction to get ready to cross over to the officers, and they shared it with the people. Verse 2. *"At the end of three days the officers went through the midst of the camp;³ and they commanded the people, saying, 'When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God with the Levitical priests carrying it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it.'*" (3:2-3)

In chapter 4, verse 19, we will learn that the crossing occurred on the 10th of Nisan, three days after the nation moved to the bank of the Jordan River on the 7th of Nisan. The big day had arrived. For the nation of Israel, it was a dream come true, forty years after leaving Egypt. Had they been camped in a stationary or semi-permeant campsite, the 10th of Nisan would be a day for selecting the unblemished lamb for the Passover. If this had been a regular year, that lamb would be slain on the morning of the 14th of Nisan and roasted through the day, and the Passover meal would occur just before the change of the day at about 6:00 PM. Then, on the 15th of Nisan, the Feast of Unleavened Bread would begin in remembrance of the first seven days the nation spent on the road after leaving

Egypt. The nation of Israel actually departed from Egypt at the end of the day on the 15th of Nisan, about thirty minutes before the sunset. We know this because Deuteronomy 16:6 says, “*you shall sacrifice the Passover in the evening at sunset, at the time that you came out of Egypt.*” They walked through the night of the 16th of Nisan under the light of the full moon. Consider another interesting detail. The nation left Egypt on the 15th of Nisan. According to Exodus 12:40-41 says, “*Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. 41 And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.*” Translation, Jacob and his sixty-six descendants (seventy counting Joseph’s family already in Egypt) moved to Egypt on the 15th of Nisan. Later, we will see that the nation will celebrate the Passover on the 15th of Nisan in the Promised Land four-hundred and seventy years after Jacob moved to Egypt and forty years after coming out of Egypt. Think of this, on the day the camp moved across the Jordan River, they would also have to select the lamb that they would protect for four more days until it was time to prepare it for the Passover meal. It was a full day. Then, they would celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread as usual. A simple thing like crossing the Jordan River on dry ground could not interrupt the Law. This instruction was not given on the crossing day; it was given on the day before, the 9th of Nisan, as we will see shortly.

The instructions say to follow “... *the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God with the Levitical priests carrying it...*” You might think that the people would actually see the Ark in all its glory carried by the priests. Every picture of the priests carrying the Ark that I have seen in my life shows the Ark in all its glory. But that would not be the case for people in the camp. The LORD gave specific instructions for how the Ark was to be transported in the book of Numbers.

“When the camp sets out, Aaron and his sons shall go in, and they shall take down the veil of the screen and cover the ark of the testimony (covenant) with it; 6 and they shall lay a covering of porpoise skin on it, and shall spread over it a cloth of pure blue, and shall insert its poles.” (Numbers 4:5–6).

When the Ark was carried by the priests, all the people would see was a box shape covered with blue cloth. Under the cloth would be porpoise skin for waterproofing and under that was the heavy veil screen. The Ark would have never be carried any other way.

3. The Space to Cross Over

But when the people saw the Ark being carried by the priests, they could not follow it to close. So, we come to the space to cross over. Verse 4. “*However, there shall be between you and it a distance of about 2,000 cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you shall go, for you have not passed this way before.*” (3:4)

Two-thousand cubits is not a short distance. It is about two-thousand nine hundred feet or a little more than a half-mile. The rest of the verse expresses the purpose of this great distance. It is so the Ark can lead the way and always be a point of reference for the direction that the nation's people should move.

4. The Time to Cross Over

Here we have it; the time to cross over will occur on the following day, the 10th of Nisan. Verse 5. “*Then Joshua said to the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.”* (3:5). It was the 9th of Nisan, and Joshua instructed the people to “*consecrate yourselves...*” In Exodus 19, in preparation for hearing the LORD speak the Ten Commandments to the people, Moses called for such a consecration. It involved washing their finest clothing and wearing them for the meeting at the foot of Mount Sinai. There is no reason why this would not be the same case here in Joshua. What better way to enter the Promised Land than in your finest clean clothing?

5. The Order to Cross Over

The next day, Joshua gave the order to cross over. Verse 6. *“And Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, ‘Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over ahead of the people.’ So they took up the ark of the covenant and went ahead of the people.”* (3:6)

Here Joshua has called for all the people to line up with the priests out front. A long line was not formed as we would think as in our day to line up in grade school to go outside. Rather, the priests were to move with the Ark to the river’s edge, and the different tribal nations would follow. Under normal marching orders, the first tribe would be Judah, followed by Issachar and then Zebulun, but that will not be the order on this day. We will see the new order in the next lesson when we complete the study of the crossing over of the Jordan River.

6. The Priests to Cross Over

The LORD gave Joshua another order for the priests to cross over. Verse 7. *“Now the LORD said to Joshua, ‘This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you.’⁸ You shall, moreover, command the priests who are carrying the ark of the covenant, saying, ‘When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.’”* (3:7-8)

When the children of Israel came out of Egypt, the LORD led them to the bank of the Red Sea. Only one pass through the mountains led to the sandy beach area. Up against the sea, the only way out was the same way they came in through the pass. But Pharaoh’s men were coming for them in the pass. The LORD stood as a column of cloud to block the pass but the Israelites were trapped by the sea – right where the LORD wanted them. The people grumbled. Then Moses said, *“Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever.”¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent.”* (Exodus 14:13–14). It was a pretty impressive speech.

As you know, the next thing that happened was the parting of the Red Sea and the crossing on dry ground. I do not think the people with Joshua were expecting what they were about to experience. At the water’s edge, the priests were to stand. The people were about to see the work of the LORD with Joshua in the same light as the work of the LORD with Moses.

7. The Message to Cross Over

a) What Israel Will Know

Finally, we come to the message to cross over. Joshua speaks of what Israel will know after the crossing. Verse 10. *“Then Joshua said to the sons of Israel, ‘Come here, and hear the words of the LORD your God.’”¹⁰ Joshua said, ‘By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will assuredly dispossess from before you the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Hivite, the Perizzite, the Gergashite, the Amorite, and the Jebusite.’* (3:9-10)

Joshua is quoting the words of the LORD. Evidently, the LORD had just spoken these words to Joshua. Once across the river, the LORD would show His power and presence to the people of Israel.

b) What Israel Will See

Joshua then speaks of what Israel will see. Verse 11. *“Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over ahead of you into the Jordan.”* (3:11)

The people of Israel will see the Ark carried into the Jordan River by the priests. I cannot imagine that the people expected the miracle that is about to occur with this crossing.

c) What Israel Will Do

Joshua states what Israel will do. Verse 12. *“Now then, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man for each tribe.”* (3:12)

Before the crossing starts, a man from each tribe must be select for an important task. Joshua does not explain the task here.

d) What Israel Will Experience

Joshua expresses what Israel will experience. Verse 13. *“It shall come about when the soles of the feet of the priests who carry the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan will be cut off, and the waters which are flowing down from above will stand in one heap.”* (3:13)

For the first time, after forty years, Israel is about to see and experience that same thing again – the parting of the waters so the nation can cross on dry ground. Joshua states the start of the miracle will occur when the soles of the priests' feet touch the water, the water will stand in one heap.

(1) The Parting of the Jordan River

The writer then explains the parting of the Jordan River in more detail. Verse 14. *“So when the people set out from their tents to cross the Jordan with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant before the people, ¹⁵ and when those who carried the ark came into the Jordan, and the feet of the priests carrying the ark were dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks all the days of harvest), ¹⁶ the waters which were flowing down from above stood and rose up in one heap, a great distance away at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan; and those which were flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. So the people crossed opposite Jericho.”* (3:14-16)

The water would stop flowing at the place called Adam, beside Zarethan. The area called Adam was thirty miles north, up the Jordan River, from the camp's location. Adam is on the east side of the Jordan River, Zarethan is on the west side. A natural valley and plain exist at Adam where the water could be diverted and stored until the Israelites were across the river. However, Who diverted the water of the Jordan, and how was it diverted? From an archeological investigation, the answer is, *we do not know how it was diverted.* From a spiritual position, we know Who diverted the waters into that valley and plain. It was the LORD of Israel.

(2) The Standing in the Jordan River

Once the waters stopped, another miracle occurs when we see the priests standing in the Jordan River. Verse 17. *“And the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all Israel crossed on dry ground, until all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan.”* (3:17)

The priests were standing on dry ground. The people were walking on dry ground. How could that happen so fast? It was the same in the days of Moses and the crossing of the Red Sea. It was all by the might, power, and will of the LORD God Almighty.

The story of the crossing is not over. There is still much to be said.