

# Stepping Out in Faith

## Joshua 3

Read Joshua 3:1-17.

It was time. Time to cross the Jordan and take possession of the land that had been promised to Abraham and his descendants. It was a moment four hundred-plus years in the making. The first step? Crossing over the Jordan River.

1. Briefly describe the current condition of the Jordan River. (v. 15)

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The Israelites crossed the Jordan opposite the city of Jericho (v. 16). During the flood season, experts say this part of the Jordan River could have been up to a mile wide and was known to be extremely turbulent.

2. **THINK:** Think about the differences between the Israelites crossing the Jordan during flood season and their ancestors crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 14). What differences would there have been? (Consider: the water, the enemy, how, etc.)

| A Sea | A River During Flood Season |
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3. How might crossing the Jordan River require more faith than crossing the Red Sea?

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In Chapter 2, we looked at the faith of one gentile woman. In Chapter 3, we will look at the faith it would take for an entire nation, having been delivered from Egypt, to **move forward with God**. We have been delivered (from sin), and like the Israelites, we are also moving forward to something new.

4. Read 1 John 5:4 and answer the following questions.

- a. What or who overcomes the world? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. What is the victory that overcomes? \_\_\_\_\_

Faith is the mechanism by which God moves us from one place to another. God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, but He never intended for them to just wander around in the wilderness. He planned to bring them into the Promised Land to be a light and witness to all the other nations. Their taking of the Promised Land would be accomplished through faith - believing God and obeying Him.

5. Go back to Joshua 1:2 and record the instructions the Lord had given to Joshua.

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In Joshua chapter 3, the nation of Israel (over 1 million people) was on the move. They moved from the Acacia Grove and came to the Jordan. Scholars estimate this was a distance of about 10 miles, and it would have taken a full day to make this trip. After arriving at the Jordan, they rested an additional day, and then, on the third day, officers moved through the camp with instructions.

6. What instructions were given to the people by the officers? (v. 3c)

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7. What specifically were they to “go after”? (v. 3a)

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We will study more about the Ark of the Covenant in the second section but understand that the Ark of the Covenant was a sign of the conditional covenant (Deuteronomy 6-8) that God made with the Children of Israel. It was also the only place where atonement for sins could take place (Leviticus 16). In this, it was a type that pointed to Jesus Christ.

8. **THINK:** How are the instructions given to the people by the officers applicable to us and our lives today?

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9. How could the Ark going before them serve to encourage their faith?

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10. The people were told to leave a space of about 1,000 yards between them and the Ark. The Ark was to be treated with great respect, as it represented the presence of God. What other reason was given for the space between the people and the Ark? (v. 4)

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11. **THINK:** Why do you think it was important for all of the people to be able to see and follow the Ark versus just following the people directly in front of them?

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Jesus made it clear to His disciples that they were to follow Him. In Matthew 16:24, He said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

12. Read the following verses and record what you learn about God and His desire for us to follow after Him alone.

Numbers 14:20-24

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I Samuel 12:14

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Isaiah 48:17

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13. In addition to the space requirement, Joshua gave specific instructions to both the people and the priests. To the people, he tells them to sanctify themselves.

a. What was the reason they were to do this? (v. 5) \_\_\_\_\_

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- b. The word *sanctify* is the same Hebrew word translated as *consecrate* in Exodus 19:10. What was the reason they were to sanctify themselves in Exodus 19:10-11?

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***Sanctify*** – consecrate oneself by purification.

In the Bible, the word *consecration* means “the separation of oneself from things that are unclean, especially anything that would contaminate one’s relationship with a perfect God.” Consecration also carries the connotation of sanctification, holiness, or purity.

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- c. With this information in mind, what is necessary for one to successfully follow after God?

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God was going to do great wonders, not only at the Jordan but throughout the Promised Land, and He is going to do great wonders in our lives as well. Like the Israelites, we must separate ourselves from the things of this world and the sin that so easily ensnares us if we are going to experience all that God has for us.

14. Read the following verses and record what this looks like for believers today.

Romans 12:1-2

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Colossians 3:5-14

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15. Why is it important that we sanctify ourselves? (1 Peter 2:9-10)

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16. In Joshua 3:6, we are given an overview of what the priests were to do. Record their general instructions below.

v. 6b \_\_\_\_\_

v. 6c \_\_\_\_\_

17. At the end of verse 6, we see the priests do as they are commanded by taking up the ark and going before the people. Next, we see the Lord telling Joshua that He would exalt Joshua in the sight of all Israel. What was the purpose of the Lord exalting Joshua? (v. 7)

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18. Next, we see the Lord give an additional instruction for the priests carrying the Ark. What is the additional instruction? (v. 8)

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19. When would the flood waters of the Jordan stop flowing? (v. 13)

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20. **THINK:** Can you think of any reasons why Joshua might have been commanded to give some of the instructions up front and then the command to stand in the river later?

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21. Read Psalm 119:1-8 and answer the following questions.

a. Who are the blessed? (v. 1-2)

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b. What do they do? (v. 3) \_\_\_\_\_

c. What would be the result of keeping God's statues (or obeying God)?

v. 6a. \_\_\_\_\_

v. 7a \_\_\_\_\_

v. 8a \_\_\_\_\_

Obedience to God directly affects our faith. As the priests obeyed God in taking up the ark and going before the people toward the Promised Land (currently occupied by enemy nations armed with armies, chariots, and high exterior walls), He would grow their faith, helping them obey the more difficult command of stepping into the rushing waters of the Jordan (while balancing the Ark of the Covenant - the touching of which would result in instant death – Numbers 4:15).

How many times have you heard yourself say something like, "I don't know how they do it? If that happened to me or if God asked me to do that, I don't think I would be able to handle/do it."

Remember that crossing the Jordan and taking the Promised Land was preceded by forty years of learning to obey and trust God.

22. Share a time when God prepared you for a challenging time of obedience through prior, smaller acts of obedience.

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23. Read Joshua 3:9-13. What would the people learn (or be reminded of) about God through this event? Be detailed and specific.

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The Lord was going to exalt Joshua through the coming circumstances, but Joshua would choose to exalt the Lord in those circumstances. The Lord of all the earth! Crossing the Jordan and the subsequent taking of the Promised Land would be accomplished through God's power in cooperation with His people's obedience.

24. Record the specifics of what happened to the water and where it took place. (v.16)

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25. **THINK:** Verse 17 tells us that the priests who bore the ark stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan. What do you think may have been the significance of, or reason why, God took the extra measure of drying the ground under their feet? What would it have meant to you if you had been one of those men standing in that riverbed on that day?

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26. Go back and refresh your memory. What was God's point and purpose in having them cross the Jordan River? (v. 10)

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27. Why would this knowledge be important both on that day and the days ahead?

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28. Are you standing on the banks of your own "Jordan" today? How will this passage of Scripture encourage you to take your step of obedience? Take time to consider how this applies to you and your situation specifically.

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Crossing the Jordan River doesn't point to us stepping into Heaven at death, but rather embracing the initial portion of our promised inheritance - growing in spiritual maturity and serving the Lord with faith-filled obedience. It is time to cross over, believe God, and move forward with Him in obedience.

# A Closer Look at the Ark of the Covenant

## Joshua 3:3

29. Read through Joshua 3 again and summarize the use of the Ark of the Covenant in this chapter.

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The Ark of the Covenant, also known as the Ark of the Testimony or the Ark of God, was designed to be a symbol of God's presence among His people. We find the first mention of the Ark in Exodus 25.

30. Read Exodus 25:8-9. What does God want them to build? Why?

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30. Read Exodus 25:10-21. Describe how the Ark was to be constructed. (v. 10-15)

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31. What was to go inside the Ark? (v. 16) \_\_\_\_\_

32. Describe the construction of the mercy seat. (v. 17-21)

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***Mercy Seat*** – to cover, placate, appease, cleanse, cancel or make atonement for.

Exodus 26 gives the specifications for the Tabernacle. Briefly look over Chapter 26.

33. Where were they to put the Ark? (v. 33) \_\_\_\_\_

34. What does the term *Most Holy* tell us about the Ark of the Covenant?

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**Holy** – Set apart, sacred, separate.

The whole tabernacle was holy in that it was set apart for worship and sacrifices to God. The Tabernacle was separated into three areas: the Outer Court, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place (or Holy of Holies). The Holy of Holies contained the Ark. The Day of Atonement was the only day the High Priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies.

Read Leviticus 16, which explains the requirements to enter the Holy of Holies and the Day of Atonement, and answer the following questions.

a. What was the Lord's warning in Leviticus 16:2? \_\_\_\_\_

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b. When was the Day of Atonement? (v. 29) \_\_\_\_\_

c. What was the purpose? (v. 30) \_\_\_\_\_

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d. Whom would atonement be made for? (v. 33)

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e. How often would this day take place? (v. 34) \_\_\_\_\_

35. Describe what Aaron was instructed to do in Leviticus 16:11-17.

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36. Why did atonement need to be made? (v. 16)

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**Atonement** – to cover, purge, reconcile, propitiate.

The Tabernacle was portable and was always packed up and transported in an orderly manner during the time Israel journeyed in the wilderness. The Ark had poles that were

inserted into the rings in the four corners of the Ark for carrying. It was always handled with care.

As we read in Chapter 3, the Ark was taken by the Israelites into the Promised Land. Joshua 18 records that the Tabernacle was assembled at Shiloh, and the Ark remained there for 369 years until the Philistines defeated Israel in a battle and captured the Ark. (1 Samuel 4:10-11). The many misfortunes that subsequently overtook the Philistines made them believe that their possession of the Ark was the cause, so they sent it back. Eventually, the Ark settled in the holy tent until King Solomon placed the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies of the first Temple. After the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., the Ark was never seen again.

As mentioned previously (pg. 2), the Ark was the only place where atonement for sins could take place. In this, it was a type that pointed to Jesus Christ.

37. Read Romans 3:21-26, review the definition of atonement and mercy seat, and describe how Jesus took the place of the Ark of the Covenant.

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38. Read John 20:12. Review the description of the Mercy Seat from Exodus 25 and note the similarities.

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What lay beneath the Mercy Seat was the law. Jesus came to fulfill the law and atone for our sins once and for all. The blood sprinkled on the Mercy Seat once a year has been replaced by the blood of Jesus. The Perfect Sacrifice!

39. Consider the Ark of the Covenant, what it represented, how it was fulfilled in Jesus, and what it signified at the crossing of the Jordan, and jot down your thoughts. Thank Jesus for His ultimate sacrifice and the atonement for your sins.

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