

JOSHUA BIBLE STUDIES

THEME: **CONQUERING: JOURNEYING WITH JOSHUA**

Lesson #6 **APPROACHING THE LAND or DOWN BY THE RIVER SIDE**  
**Joshua chapters 3, 4, 5:1-12**

The setting for these chapters is down at the Jordan River. Shall we gather at the river and watch what is about to happen as the Israelites move across? This is now the second time that these people have faced deep waters. The first time was 40 years before at the Red Sea. The contrasts are worth noting:

***The Red Sea***

An Exit  
A Departure  
Enemies Behind Them  
An End

***The Jordan River***

An Entrance  
A Destination  
Enemies Ahead of Them  
A Beginning

In some ways, crossing the Jordan River was more of a challenge than crossing the Red Sea. At the Red Sea, the only option open to them was the miracle path through the waters, for behind them was the pursuing army of Pharaoh. They were between the Devil and the deep blue sea!

But at Jordan, no armed enemy threatened. They were not on the run. They were fed, clothed, watered and sheltered by God. They were pretty well fixed. To pull up stakes now and head for "giant land" would require a substantial measure of faith and obedience.

Nearly forty years before when they were faced with this same decision they held counsel and adopted the majority report which said, "Maintain the status quo and don't go." That vote is now up for repeal. Opportunity is knocking again. What will they do? Samuel Johnson said, "To improve the golden moment of opportunity, and catch the good that is within our reach, is the great art of life."

Everyone dreams of a new start of some kind. Stretching before Israel are unlimited possibilities in the land of milk and honey. An unknown writer left us with this:

*"For each of us who have traveled the road of sorrow,  
Misfortune and sin,  
There's a wonderful place of courage and hope called  
The Land of Beginning Again!"*

But we must not forget that when God writes opportunity on one side of the door, He writes responsibility on the other side! The Jordan River is Israel's door. The river itself is 65 miles long and in that distance descends 610 feet. The word, "Jordan" means "descender" or "down comer." And it comes down! It averages a drop of 9 feet per mile and with its zigzag course it can be pretty swift especially at flood stage. And that is the way Joshua found it. We read in Joshua 3:15 that, Jordan was flooded, overflowing all its banks at this time.

The stage is therefore set for yet another lesson down by the river side. Look first at Israel.....

**I. STARTING ON THE BRINK - THE PLACE OF DECISION – Joshua 3:8**

*"When you have come to the edge of the water of the Jordan, you shall stand in the Jordan."*

**A. The People on the Brink.**

Joshua 3:1 tells us that early in the morning *"all the people of Israel"* were standing on the river's edge. Approximately two and one-half million people are spread across the face of the earth.

Moses had counted the people at Sinai about forty years before. (Numbers 1:3)

However, the

count did not include any under twenty years of age. Since then, all above twenty years of age at that time had died. (Joshua 5:6)

The people who stood on the brink of Jordan now were a new generation. No one was over sixty. A comparatively young nation. Many of these people had been children or teen-agers at Kadesh-Barnea 40 years before when their parents refused to enter the promised land and instead said, *"Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt."* (Num. 14:4)

The unbelieving generation had died and now their children are encamped on the edge of the promised land - a land of possibility and opportunity. Will they press on or go back like their parents did? They are now standing on the brink of claiming their inheritance. They were viewing it across the river.

*"On Jordan's stormy banks I stand  
And cast a wishful eye  
To Canaan's fair and happy land  
Where my possessions lie."*

That is as close as some ever get to the land where:

*"The milk and honey flow  
And the grapes of Eschol grow."*

They are content to view the possibilities across the rivers of difficulty but they never "possess

their possessions." The Lord had said, *"Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon,*

*that have I given you."* (Joshua 1:3) Their faith must get in their feet; it was not enough to want it they must walk it; not enough to prize and praise it, but they must possess it! Some of you may have discovered a Jordan River flowing between you and your goal. You may be even now on the brink. What will you do? "Nothing ventured – nothing gained." - "He who hesitates is lost."

John G. Whittier wrote: "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, The saddest are these:" It might have been." Will that be your lament? Or will you say,

*"I am bound for the promised land,  
I am bound for the promised land!  
Oh, who will come and go with me?  
I am bound for the promised land."*

**B. The Promise on the Brink.**

*“within three days you will cross over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess. ” Joshua 1:11*

Standing on the brink they received dual promises from God: (1) *“within three days you will cross over this Jordan “* and (2) *“possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you”*

God’s Performances are based upon His promises. But, we seldom benefit from His performances unless and until we believe His promises. Like Abraham, we must be *“fully persuaded that, what He has promised, He is able also to perform.”* (Rom.4:21)  
It is not difficult, *“When all is peace and joy and health And fortune brings to you much wealth,”* to cling to the promises of God. But, *“When doubts and fears assail our soul And over our lives like sea billows roll”* to cling to the promises of God, is evidence of true faith and trust.

**C. The Pause on the Brink - Read Joshua 3:1-2**

Shakespeare said, "There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune." (Julius Caesar, Act 4, sc.3) Will they move on to fortune?

For three days two and a half million people - men, women and children, were encamped beside the flooded river- the obstacle that barred their entrance in the land of promise. No doubt many questions had been muttered and uttered as the people looked at the muddy, turbulent flooded river.

Were they waiting for the flood to subside? No! I believe God parked them there so that they would realize that without His intervention, they could not move forward. The Lord wanted to impress Israel with their own utter helplessness. Three days to bring them to the end of their own resources; Three days to make them conscious of their own insufficiency; Three days to shut them up completely to the Lord and His promise and then the miracle would be more appreciated by Israel.

Human emergencies are but opportunities for God to display His omnipotence. Do you have any flooded rivers, any barriers preventing you from making progress in your life? Face it squarely and trust the Lord to make a way, when there seems to be no way.

*“Got any rivers you think are uncrossable?  
Got any mountains you can’t tunnel through?  
God specializes in things thought impossible,  
He does what none other can do.”*

Here they were, starting on the brink. Now see them:

**II. STEPPING ON THE BOTTOM - THE PLACE OF DEATH**

*Josh 3:1 “Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.”*

They have made their decision. Faith and obedience have been blended with the promises of God and they are on their way! There were those, no doubt, who said, "We can't do it; we'll all be drowned." But when *"the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water..... that the waters ..... were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho."* (Joshua 3:15-16)

Notice that the water did not recede when the priests were 50 yards away. It did not open up when they were 5 yards away or 1 yard away or 6 inches away. But only when their feet touched it. God is never ahead of time or behind time; He always on time!

The life of a disciple of Jesus Christ is lived one step at a time. How do we journey to heaven? By taking one step at a time, one day at a time. There they were, stepping along on the river's bottom, water piled high on their right hand and their left hand. What can we learn by Israel's walking along that river bed?

#### **A. It Was a Place Where Mercy Was Realized.**

The Ark of God, carried by the Priests, was out in the middle of the river. The top of the Ark was the Mercy Seat. Here in the place of extreme danger was the symbol of the mercy of God.

- It was by the mercy of God that they had been sustained for 40 years in the wilderness;
- It was the mercy of God that now held back the raging flood waters;
- It was the mercy of God that made a path when there was no path;
- It is by the mercy of God that they are crossing the last obstacle between themselves and their future.

You may be viewing your future across obstacles that have already reached a high-water mark. When you step out by faith you can expect the Lord to show mercy for *"goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...."* (Psalm 23:6) and *"The mercy of the Lord endures forever."* (Psalm 106:1)

Whatever the Jordan you face, His might and mercy will enable you to get through for He is the Lord of the swollen river!

#### **B. It Was A Place Where Mortification Was Symbolized.**

The riverbed of Jordan was the place of death. This passage was not natural – it was supernatural and symbolized death to the past and resurrection to a new life and land ahead.

The path of the child of God from the wilderness of the flesh to the Canaan of victory in the spirit leads through the Jordan of death to self. *"We are buried with Him by baptism into death."* (Romans 6:4).

"It is that crisis in which we are forced to the supreme choice whether there shall be an utter once-for-all abandon of ourselves to the will of God or whether we shall take what

seems to be the easier way of continuing in the Christian life, but with a reservation in our love to God." (Baxter, Vol. 1, pg. 256).

Jordan marks the end of self-life and the beginning of the Christ-life. The passing from Romans chapter 7 to Romans chapter 8 in our Christian experience.

### **C. It Was A Place Where Migration Was Memorialized.**

Read Joshua 4:20-24. We forget all too soon. The Lord said to Moses in Deut.8:2, "*You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God led you.*" The memorial stones were to cause them to remember - to remember not what they did but what God did. They were Rocks of Remembrance. Those stones were to remind them ever after that when they faced yet another crisis the Jehovah of the Jordan miracle was more than sufficient for their every need.

Do you have a mental memorial of when you were born again? When you were baptized? When God answered you at a time of special need? A mental monument to which you can point "when doubts arise and fears dismay"? Memorials are memory joggers, reminders of God's presence and power. Erect many memorials as you cross the Jordan's of life.

### **III. STANDING ON THE BORDER - THE PLACE OF DESTINY**

Joshua 4:19-20 "*the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, And they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal.*"

Good newspaper headlines at the time would have been:

- "Mass Of Humanity Invades Canaan! Or
- "Home At Last!" Or
- "Objective Accomplished!" Or
- "Land, Lots Of Land Under Starry Skies Above!"

The Israelites have at last established a beach-head in Canaan, the land of promise. During the long years in Egypt and the wilderness, the descendents of Abraham may have Forgotten the promise of a land grant. But the One who said to Abraham, way back in Genesis 13 - "*I give it to your seed forever*" did not forget. Now, they are in the land of opportunities. A new day has dawned. The impossible dream has come true for "*with God all things are possible.*" (Matthew 19:26)

### **Consider Three New Things That They Had:**

#### **A. A New Life.**

Life would never be the same for them. Life in Egypt and life in the wilderness was behind them. Their future was before them. They are now on resurrection ground. "Old things are *passed away; all things are new*" (II Corinthians 5:12).

Romans 6:4 sums it up in these words, "*we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so*

*we also should walk in newness of life.”*

### **B. A New Leader.**

**Joshua 3:7** - *“And the LORD said to Joshua, “This day 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.”*  
 And, **Joshua 4:14** - *“On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they had feared Moses, all the days of his life.”*

The old leader was dead.(1:1) The miracle at Jordan credentialized and authorized Joshua before the people. Before the Jordan experience the people respected him, but now they see him in a different light and trust his leadership.

Many know Jesus Christ as Savior but few follow Him as Lord. Only when we have followed Him out of the wilderness of living in the flesh and into the Canaan of living in the Spirit can we say in truth, "The Lord *is* my Shepherd."

(By the way – Jesus was credentialized at the Jordan River – when He was baptized the Father spoke from heaven saying, *“This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.”*)

### **C. A New Land.**

**Joshua 3:4** - *“you have not passed this way before.”* When the people stepped out of Jordan on to Canaan's shore, they were stepping into a totally different world. There were many changes:

- 1. There were geographical changes.** (Read Deut. 11:10-12.)
- 2. There were sociological changes.** For forty years they had camped together in the wilderness. They had lived as one great city on the move. Now, after Canaan is subdued, each tribe is to live independently in a different part of the country.
- 3. There were ideological changes.** Once their only purpose was to survive in the wilderness. Now their purpose is to subdue Canaan.
- 4. There were physiological changes.** There was the circumcision which is recorded in Joshua 5:2.
- 5. There were nutritional changes.** There was new food. Josh 5:11-12 *“And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.”*
- 6. There were residential changes.** For 40 years they had lived in tents. Now they built houses and cities.
- 7. There were occupational changes.** Up to this time, to obtain food they needed but

