

CONQUERING CANAAN

Date: 11.01.26 | Crossing The Jordan
Scripture: Joshua 3-4

CENTRAL TRUTHS



PRESCHOOL:

God is with His people and makes a way for them.

YOUNGER KIDS (K5-2ND GRADE):

God is powerful and faithful; we can trust Him to make a way for His people.

OLDER KIDS (3RD-5TH GRADE):

God's people can trust Him because He is present, powerful, and faithful to keep His promises.

STUDENTS:

Remembering God's faithfulness gives us courage to trust Him with what lies ahead and reminds us that He has made the way for our salvation through Jesus.

ADULTS:

The living God faithfully goes before His people, accomplishes what they cannot accomplish for themselves, and calls them to remember and proclaim His saving work—ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

MEMORY VERSE

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9



DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The Living God. God is described as “the living God” in every section of Scripture. As the living God, He is greatly to be feared by all except his elect people, He is always among His people providing guidance and protection, and He is eternally living. The eternal living God is the very source of eternal life for His people. Robert D. Culver, Systematic Theology, 71-72.

BACKGROUND INFO FOR LEADERS

Joshua 3–4 describes the miraculous way God brought Joshua and the Israelites across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. The Hebrew verb meaning “crossover” occurs more than 20 times in these two chapters, emphasizing this important transition for God’s people. This event intentionally parallels the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus. Just as God parted the Red Sea to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, He now stopped the Jordan River so His people could cross on dry ground and enter the land He had promised them. **Psalm 114:3** brings together these two miraculous crossings: “The sea looked and fled; Jordan turned back.”

These two crossings also help us see a picture of the salvation and new life God ultimately provides through Jesus Christ. At the Red Sea, the Israelites were rescued from slavery and led into freedom. At the Jordan, they crossed over from wandering in the wilderness into the land God had promised them. In an even greater way, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, believers are rescued from slavery to sin and brought into a new life with Christ. Salvation is not something we accomplish for ourselves; God is the One who rescues, makes a way, and leads His people into the life He has promised. Believers now live this new life through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

In **Joshua 1:11**, the officers had alerted the people that they would cross over the Jordan “within three days.” Now, in **Joshua 3**, the officers appeared again to give more specific directions. Joshua organized the people for their march, but significantly, the priests—not the army or the generals—were to go first, carrying the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark symbolized and mediated the Lord’s presence among His people (**Exodus 25:10–22**). It was normally kept in the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle and, later, the temple. Its position at the front of the people emphasized that God Himself was going before Israel and leading the way.



The Israelites were instructed to remain about two thousand cubits, or just over half a mile, behind the Ark (*Joshua 3:4*). From this distance, the people would have been able to see the Ark and follow its path. They were entering territory they had never traveled before, so their security was not found in knowing the way themselves but in following the presence and direction of God.

Before the journey began, Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you” (*Joshua 3:5*). These words echo the Lord’s instructions through Moses at Mount Sinai in *Exodus 19:10–15*. The people were to sanctify, or set apart, themselves in preparation for what God was about to do. Joshua’s announcement that the Lord would perform “wonders” also recalls the mighty acts or “wonders” God performed in Egypt (*Exodus 3:20*). The same God who demonstrated His power to rescue His people from Egypt was still present with them and faithful to His promises.

Through Joshua’s leadership at the Jordan, God also began to establish Joshua as Moses’ appointed successor. The Lord told Joshua, “Today 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” (*Joshua 3:7*). After the crossing, the people “stood in awe of him just as they had stood in awe of Moses” (*Joshua 4:14*). Joshua was not the source of Israel’s deliverance; God was. But God worked through His chosen leader to bring His people where He had promised they would go.

The Lord also promised that the crossing would demonstrate that “the living God is among you” (*Joshua 3:10*). The seven nations listed in the passage were the peoples God had promised to drive out before Israel (*see Deuteronomy 7:1*). Israel’s confidence as they entered Canaan was not to rest in their military strength but in the presence and power of the living God who was with them.

Joshua was instructed to choose one man from each of Israel’s twelve tribes (*Joshua 3:12*). These twelve representatives would later take twelve stones from the Jordan as a memorial of what God had done.

Joshua 3:14–17 emphasizes just how impossible the crossing appeared. The Jordan was overflowing its banks because it was harvesting season (*Joshua 3:15*). Its swollen waters would have made crossing extremely dangerous. Yet as soon as the feet of the

priests carrying the Ark touched the edge of the water, the river stopped flowing. The priests stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all Israel crossed safely.

Joshua 3:16 describes the waters rising up in “a heap,” the same language associated with the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea (*Exodus 15:8; Psalm 78:13*). The water was stopped as far upriver as Adam, approximately eighteen miles north. Whether God stopped the waters with no visible physical obstruction or providentially used a natural event such as a mudslide, the timing makes the point unmistakable: this was the work of God. The river stopped exactly as God had promised when the priests stepped into the water.

The parallels between the Jordan and the Red Sea were intentional. *Joshua 4:23* says, “For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea.” The generation entering Canaan was experiencing firsthand the same faithful power of God their parents had experienced when leaving Egypt. God had not changed. He was still the covenant-keeping God who made a way for His people when they could not make a way for themselves.

When the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord told Joshua to have the twelve selected men each take a stone from the place where the priests had stood (*Joshua 4:1–5*). These stones were to “be a sign among you.” When future generations asked, “What do those stones mean to you?” God’s people were to tell their children that “the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD” (*Joshua 4:6–7*). The stones were to “be to the people of Israel a memorial forever.”

The memorial was important because God did not want His people merely to experience His faithfulness; He wanted them to remember His faithfulness and tell others about it. Future generations who had not personally walked through the Jordan would still hear what the Lord had done. Remembering God’s past faithfulness would give His people reason to trust Him in the future.

Once the Ark of the Covenant came out of the Jordan, “the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks, as before” (*Joshua 4:18*). The twelve stones Joshua set up at Gilgal became the first of seven stone memorials described in Joshua (*Joshua 7:26; 8:28–29; 8:32; 10:27; 22:34; 24:26–27*). This first memorial stood as a lasting reminder that God had faithfully brought

Israel across the Jordan and into the Promised Land.

But the memorial was intended to communicate something beyond Israel. *Joshua 4:24* explains the ultimate purpose of the miracle: “so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever.” God’s mighty work was meant to reveal His character both to His covenant people and to the nations around them. Yahweh is the living God, mighty to save, faithful to His promises, present with His people, and worthy of their complete devotion.

For believers today, *Joshua 3–4* ultimately directs our attention beyond the Jordan to God’s greatest act of rescue in Jesus Christ. Israel could not stop the Jordan or create its own way into the Promised Land; God had to make the way for them. Likewise, sinners cannot rescue themselves from sin or create their own way into life with God. God has made the way through Jesus. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, we are rescued from sin and brought into new life with Him. The same God who told Israel to remember His mighty acts has given us the gospel—the good news of the greatest rescue He has accomplished. Remembering what God has done in Christ gives us confidence to trust Him, obey Him, and tell the next generation about His faithfulness.

TELL THE STORY

Joshua 2

The Jesus Storybook Bible – The Warrior Leader

Hey-O! Stories of the Bible – The Israelites Cross the Jordan

For forty years, the Israelites had wandered in the wilderness. But now they were finally standing near the land God had promised to give them. There was just one major problem. A river stood in their way.

And this wasn’t a small, peaceful river that they could easily walk across. The Jordan River was overflowing its banks because it was harvesting season (*Joshua 3:15*). The water was deep, wide, and rushing past them. Thousands and thousands of Israelites needed to get to the other side. How were they going to cross? God had a plan.



Joshua told the people to watch for the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark represented God's presence with His people. When the priests picked it up and began moving, the people were supposed to follow. This was important because Joshua told them, "You have not passed this way before" (*Joshua 3:4*).

They didn't know the way. But God did. God would go before His people and show them where to go. Before they started, Joshua gave the Israelites an important command: "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you" (*Joshua 3:5*). Get ready. Set yourselves apart for God. Pay attention. God was about to do something only God could do.

The Lord also told Joshua, "Today 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" (*Joshua 3:7*). God had been with Moses when he led the Israelites out of Egypt. Now Moses was gone, and Joshua was their leader. God wanted His people to know that He would be with Joshua just as He had been with Moses.

Then Joshua told the Israelites something else: "Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you" (*Joshua 3:10*). The Israelites were about to enter a land filled with powerful enemies. But they would not have to wonder if God was really with them. The living God was among His people, and He would demonstrate His power right in front of them. The priests picked up the Ark of the Covenant and began walking toward the Jordan River. Imagine being one of those priests. The water was still rushing. God hadn't stopped it yet. Step after step, they moved closer. Then the priests' feet touched the edge of the water. And the river stopped.

The Bible says the water coming downstream "stood and rose up in a heap" far away from them (*Joshua 3:16*). The priests carrying the Ark walked into the middle of the river and stood on dry ground. Not muddy ground. Not ankle-deep water. Dry ground. Then the entire nation of Israel crossed the Jordan safely while the priests stood in the middle holding the Ark (*Joshua 3:17*). Does that remind you of another Bible story?

Years earlier, God's people had been trapped between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea. There was no way for them to escape on their own. But God made a way. He divided the Red Sea, and His people walked through on dry ground (*Exodus 14*).

Now God was doing something very similar. At the Red Sea, God had brought His people out of slavery in Egypt. At the Jordan River, God was bringing His people into the land He had promised them. *Joshua 4:23* connects these two events: “The LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea.” God wanted this generation to understand something their parents and grandparents had learned before them: The Lord is faithful. The Lord is powerful. And when God’s people cannot make a way for themselves, God can make a way for them. Once everyone had crossed, God wasn’t finished.

Remember those twelve men Joshua had chosen—one from each of Israel’s twelve tribes? God gave them a job. Each man was to walk back into the middle of the Jordan to the place where the priests were standing and pick up one large stone (*Joshua 4:1–5*). One man. One tribe. One stone. Twelve tribes. Twelve stones. They carried the stones out of the river and brought them to the place where Israel would camp. Why would God tell them to carry twelve rocks out of a river? Because God knew His people needed to remember. Joshua told them that one day their children would see those stones and ask: “What do those stones mean to you?” (*Joshua 4:6*). When that happened, the Israelites were supposed to tell them the story. They could say: “Those stones came from the middle of the Jordan River. God stopped the water, and our people crossed on dry ground. God made a way for us.”

The stones were to be “a memorial forever” (*Joshua 4:7*). The children who came later wouldn’t have seen the Jordan stop. They wouldn’t have walked across the river themselves. But their parents could tell them what God had done. And then they could tell their children. And their children could tell the next generation. Don’t forget what God has done.

After everyone was safely across and the priests carrying the Ark stepped out of the river, something happened immediately. The water returned. The Jordan began overflowing its banks again, “as before” (*Joshua 4:18*). The miracle was over. But the stones remained. And so did the story. God also kept His promise concerning Joshua. The Bible says, “On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel,” and the people respected him just as they had respected Moses (*Joshua 4:14*). But Joshua wasn’t the hero who stopped the river. God was. Joshua didn’t control the water. God did. The priests didn’t make a path through the Jordan. God did.

God made the way for His people. And God explained exactly why He wanted Israel to remember what happened. It wasn't just so they could tell an amazing story about crossing a river. Joshua said God did this "so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever" (*Joshua 4:24*). God wanted Israel to remember who He is. He is the living God. He is powerful. He keeps His promises. He is present with His people. And He is able to save. The crossing of the Jordan also helps us understand something even greater that God has done for us. The Israelites couldn't stop the Jordan River and make their own way across. God had to make the way. And we have an even bigger problem that we cannot solve ourselves. Sin.

We cannot work hard enough, behave well enough, or obey enough rules to rescue ourselves from sin. But God made a way for us. God sent His Son, Jesus. Jesus lived the sinless life we could never live. He died on the cross, taking the punishment our sin deserves, and He rose again. Everyone who trusts in Jesus is forgiven and rescued from sin. At the Red Sea, God rescued His people from slavery. At the Jordan, God brought His people into the land He had promised. And through Jesus, God rescues us from sin and brings us into new life with Him. That's the greatest rescue God's people can remember. The Israelites had twelve stones to remind them of what God had done. We have something even greater to remember: The gospel. Jesus died. Jesus rose again. Jesus saves. And just as Israel was supposed to tell the next generation what God had done, we can tell others about what God has done for us through Jesus. Remember what God has done. Trust Him for what comes next. And tell others about His mighty power to save.

REBUILD THE STORY

1. What were the Israelites supposed to follow as they prepared to cross the Jordan River? (*Joshua 3:3–4*)
2. What did Joshua tell the people to do before God performed His wonder? (*Joshua 3:5*)
3. What did God say the crossing would show the Israelites about Joshua and about Himself? (*Joshua 3:7, 10*)



4. What happened when the priests carrying the Ark stepped into the Jordan River? (*Joshua 3:15–17*)
5. What did God command the twelve chosen men to do after Israel crossed the Jordan? Why were there twelve men? (*Joshua 4:1–5*)
6. What was the purpose of the twelve stones? (*Joshua 4:6–7*)
7. How did this miracle affect the way the Israelites viewed Joshua, and who was he compared to? (*Joshua 4:14*)
8. Why did God want His people to remember what He had done at the Jordan? (*Joshua 4:23–24*)
9. Why do you think God had the priests step into the Jordan River before He stopped the water? What did that require the Israelites to believe about God?
10. Why was it important for the Israelites to remember what God had done at the Jordan, especially when they were about to face powerful enemies in the Promised Land?
11. The Israelites built a memorial so future generations would hear what God had done. Why do you think God wants His people to tell others about His mighty works instead of keeping those experiences to themselves?
12. The Israelites couldn't make their own way through the Jordan, so God made a way for them. How does that help us understand what God has done for us through Jesus?

GOSPEL EMPHASIS

Throughout Joshua, we see that God is the One who takes the initiative to rescue, provide for, and keep His promises to His people. In *Joshua 1*, God promised to give Israel the land—not because they had earned it by perfectly keeping His Law, but because He is gracious and faithful to His promises. In *Joshua 2*, Rahab heard what the Lord had done, believed that He was the true God, and responded in faith. Now, in *Joshua 3–4*, Israel stands before another obstacle they cannot overcome on their own. They cannot stop the Jordan River or make their own way into the Promised Land, so God makes the way for them (*Joshua 3:14–17*). This points us toward the greater rescue God provides through Jesus. We cannot earn salvation through obedience, good works, or our own efforts. God graciously made the way for sinners to be rescued by sending Jesus to die for our sin and rise again. Like Rahab, we respond to God's grace by trusting Him in faith. And like Israel with the twelve stones, we remember and tell others what God has done (*Joshua 4:6–7, 21–24*). The gospel is the greatest act of God's faithfulness for us to remember and proclaim that God has made the way for sinners to be rescued and brought into new life through Jesus.



WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE TEACH US ABOUT GOD?

Use the attributes of God list and determine the characteristics of God that we see in today's story. How can knowing these characteristics of God to be true change the way we live in Christ?

PRAYER PROMPTS

God, thank You for the countless Bible accounts we have access to that teach us Your character. Help us actively remember the milestone moments of Your work in our lives so we can rely on them as we navigate life in Christ.



THIS WEEK'S BIBLE READING

Joshua 6