
Joshua 3

Joshua 3:1–17

The Israelites Cross Over the Jordan River

Outline of Chapter 3:

- vv. 1–6 The people and the priests are given their first set of commands
- vv. 7–8 God speaks to Joshua
- vv. 9–13 Joshua describes what will happen to the people
- vv. 14–17 Joshua's words are fulfilled

Charts:

Introduction **Grouping Joshua 3 and 4 as a Unit**

Introuction: Barnes separates this chapter into two sections: vv. 1–6 describe *the preliminary instructions and vv. 7–17 describe the commencement of the passage...A certain completeness and finish is given to each division of the narrative, and to effect this the writer more than once repeats himself, anticipates the actual order of events, and distributes into parts occurrences which in fact took place once for all.*¹ Joshua 3 is fascinating because we get a marvelous insight into Joshua, the man. We have already found out that he is a man of action, a man of a few words, and we will see here that he is very methodical. He is going to take some great spiritual truths for granted—not in a negative way, but in a way which reveals great faith—and he moves his people ahead without a specific promise from God to do what he tells the people will be done. Joshua makes certain assumptions and has certain expectations of God and demonstrates great faith in the application of his assumptions and expectations. Very few expositors recognize the great spiritual strength that he demonstrates in this chapter.

In this chapter and the next, Joshua uses an “overlay” technique in which, having narrated the crossing to its conclusion (ch. 3), he returns to various points in the event to enlarge on several details;² the first 3/4th of chapter 4 will give us greater details on what occurred immediately after the crossing of the people at the end of Joshua 4, more or less picking up where Joshua 3:17 lets off. Even Reese, in his chronological Bible, does not attempt to sort this out chronologically. This is the same man who throws in the short Num. 27:12–14 into Deuteronomy 32; who begins with Joshua 1, quickly goes to Joshua 2, goes back to Joshua 1 then 2 then 1 again—even he does not attempt to correlate these two chapters chronologically. He does place the time of the crossing of the Jordan at 1422 B.C.

We need to understand something first: Joshua did not need special revelation from God every fifteen minutes to figure out what to do. A precedent had been set in the desert already where the sons of Israel followed the lead of the ark. Thus they set out from the mountain of Jehovah three days journey, with the ark of the covenant of Jehovah journeying in front of them for the three days, to seek out a resting place for them (Num. 10:33). When gen X failed, the ark did NOT lead them into battle: But they went up heedlessly to the ridge of the hill country; neither the ark of the covenant of Jehovah nor Moses left the camp (Num. 14:4).

Many exegetes group chapters 3 and 4 together and this allows for a pattern to be established:

Grouping Joshua 3 and 4 as a Unit

God spoke to Joshua; the ark was to lead Israel (Num. 10:33 14:4)
Joshua commanded the people (Joshua 1:10–11 3:3–6)
God commands Joshua (Joshua 3:7–8)

¹ Barnes' Notes, Baker Books, ©1996; Vol. II, p. 357.

² The NIV Study Bible; ©1995; p. 291.

Grouping Joshua 3 and 4 as a Unit

Joshua commands the people (Joshua 3:9–13)
 The people obey Joshua (Joshua 3:14–17)

God commands Joshua (Joshua 4:1–3)
 Joshua commands the people (Joshua 4:4–7)
 The people obey Joshua (Joshua 4:8–14)

God commands Joshua (Joshua 4:15–16)
 Joshua commands the people (Joshua 4:17)
 The people obey Joshua (Joshua 4:18–20)
 Joshua speaks to the people (Joshua 4:21–24)

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It appears by this outline that God speaks to Joshua every fifteen minutes to get him to do something. This, however, is not the case. For instance, there is a command which deals with the monument of twelve stones which we find stretched from Joshua 3:12 to 4:24; God gives Joshua the command in Joshua 4:1–3; Joshua voices this command to the people in Joshua 3:12 and 4:45; the people obey Joshua in Joshua 4:8–9, 19–20; and Joshua explains their meaning in Joshua 4:6–7 and 4:21–24. My point in all of this is that we are not dealing with something that is entirely chronological or topological. We have something which seems to be written in more of a stream of consciousness, with no rewrites, years later (which is implied by both the weaving of the events and Joshua 4:9, which reads: *Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan at the place where the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing, and they are there to this day*). Keil and Delitzsch write: *...so peculiar to the Hebrew mode of writing history to mark and round off the several points in the occurrences described, by such comprehensive statements as anticipate the actual course of events. It is to this arrangement and dovetailing of the differing points that we must attribute the distribution of the revelation and commands which Joshua received from God, over the several portions of the history; and consequently we are not to suppose, that at each separate point during the passage God revealed to Joshua what he was to do, but must rather assume that He actually revealed and commanded whatever was requisite all at once on the day before any miraculous passage.*³ There are some—Paulus, Eichhorn, Bleek, Knobel—who teach that Joshua is compounded from two different documents; their reasoning is *founded upon nothing else than a total oversight of the arrangement explained above and doctrinal objections to its miraculous contents.*⁴ In other words, what we have in this chapter is probably one set of commands from God, or possibly two (the second beginning in Joshua 4:1) scattered over at least five portions of Scripture between Joshua 1 and 4. Joshua recalls and records the events, what God had said to him, and what he said to the people probably long after these things took place. He tended to see things in terms of events, so these first four chapters are divided into events. Well, prior to an event, Joshua has to give the orders; prior to Joshua giving the orders, he has to have received orders from God; therefore, as Joshua recounts these events, he first gives God's commands to him, then his commands to the people, and then the following of these commands. This is not a formula to which he holds to unwaveringly, but a general pattern found throughout Joshua with some exceptions. What I am saying is that this is not a narrative which is meticulously crafted after a particular pattern—we have a general pattern commiserate with the thinking of an older man years later. This does not mean that there are any inaccuracies, exaggerations, or untruths to be found in this book. It just helps us to grasp the style of Joshua in general.

Lest we forget, there are two generations of Israelites in view—gen X and the generation of promise. Gen X came out of Egypt and failed over and over again. They were led right up to the land and they would not enter into the land, given them by God, out of fear. God loathed that generation and killed all of them, save three or four (Moses, Joshua, Caleb and Eleazar). The generation of promise, after their parents died out, moved into the land in a somewhat circuitous route (along the east side of the Dead Sea and the Jordan). They have experienced at

³ Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, p. 30.

⁴ Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, p. 30, footnote.

least one similar test—the *no-water* test—which they failed. They moaned and complained and God provided them with water, despite the failure of Moses. The next test will be the drying up of the River Jordan. The previous generation saw God dry up the Sea of Reeds in order for them to cross and this generation will see God dry up the Jordan River so that they can cross over into the land. They will see the mighty hand of God and they, unlike their fathers, will trust in God this time. One thing that McGee points out that is important is that the generation of promise crossing the Jordan River was a greater test of faith than gen X crossing the Sea of Reeds because, in the latter situation, they, at crossing, would have completely escaped the Egyptians; however, for the generation of promise, when they crossed the Jordan River, they were moving into enemy territory and there was no backing up.

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The People and the Priests Are Given Their First Set of Commands

Literally:

Smoother English rendering:

Then Joshua arose early in the morning. Then they departed from the Shittim. Then they came as far as the Jordan, he and all of the sons of Israel. Then they lodged there before they passed over.

Joshua
3:1

Then Joshua got up early that morning and they departed from Acacia Grove. They advanced to the Jordan, he and all Israel, lodged there and then crossed over the Jordan river.

Joshua's style of writing is distinct from the style of Moses. His sentences are typically strung together by the *wâw* consecutive as opposed to the *wâw* conjunction. His vocabulary is simpler. Where we find a significant number of words in the writings of Moses and of Job which occur only once or twice in the entire Bible, most of the words found in this book are found 20–1000 times elsewhere in the Word of God. The first verb is the Hiphil imperfect of *shâkam* (שָׁכַם) [pronounced *shaw-KAHM*], which means *to start, to rise, to rise early, to make an early start*. This verb is found only in the Hiphil. Strong's #7925 BDB #1014.

As we have seen, *the Shittim* may be rendered *Acacia Grove*, as these trees were found on both sides of the Jordan along the upper terraces of the valley. Israel was probably camped over a huge portion of the land on the other side of a long line of these trees. Leaving Shittim (not a bad name for a movie) was equivalent to leaving human security behind. They had conquered that land and could have settled there; they chose not to.

The second verb is the Qal imperfect of *nâçâ* (נָצַח) [pronounced *naw-SAHÇ*], which means *to journey, to depart*. It denotes the pulling up the stakes of a tent. Strong's #5265 BDB #652. At this point, Barnes estimates them to be a distance of six miles from the Jordan.

The preposition preceding *the Jordan* is *ad* (אֲד) [pronounced *âd*], which means *as far as*. Strong's #5704 BDB #723. The Jordan river has been an important part of human history. At one time, that area was a garden. **And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well-watered everywhere—before Jehovah destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—like the garden of Jehovah, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar (Gen. 13:40).** The Jordan River is one of the few physical ties between the book of Job and Jewish history: **"If a river rages, he is not alarmed; he is confident, though the Jordan rushes to his mouth."** (Job 40:23).

The second to the last verb is the Qal imperfect of *lûn* (לָוַן) [pronounced *loon*], which means *to lodge, to spend the night, to abide*. Strong's #3885 BDB #533.

Then it came to pass at the end of three days, then the officers pass through in [the] midst of the camp.

Joshua
3:2

Then, at the end of the three days, the officers went to the midst of the camp.

After the phrase, *then it came to pass*, we have the preposition *mîn* and the masculine singular construct of *qâṭseh* (קָצֵה) [pronounced *kaw-TSEH*], which means *end, extremity*. With the *mîn* preposition, it means *at the end of, after*. Strong's #7097 BDB #892. Those who went through the camp were *shôṭêr* (שׁוֹטֵר) [pronounced *sho-TARE*], which means *official, commissioned officer, officer*. Strong's #7860 BDB #1009. The verb which follows is the Qal imperfect of *'âḇvar* (עָבַר) [pronounced *aw-BAHR*], which means *to pass over, to pass through, to pass, to go over*. Strong's #5674 BDB #716. What they passed through was the construct of *qereḇv* (קֶרֶב) [pronounced *KEH-reḇv*], which means *midst, inward part*. Strong's #7130 BDB #899. What they went through the midst of was the *camp* or *encampment* (Strong's #4264 BDB #334).

If we look at the book of Joshua as being strictly chronological, we become confused. Therefore, let's get a grasp of the time frame here. They did not break camp, go to the Jordan, and then sit on their hands for three days. That is, Joshua did not first give the order to get ready to move out, then sent out the spies, and then send out his officers to move the troops into position. Joshua gave the order in Joshua 1:11 to prepare to move out (which chronologically took place after Joshua 2—after the spies). Then, at the end of those three days, the troops moved out to the Jordan river. Why three days—why not one day? It would take at least one full day, if not two, for the population of Israel to be informed that they were moving out. It would then take a day of travel and a day to stand still and watch the deliverance of God.

Let's try this again. There were no orders to move out until Joshua had heard back from the spies. How ridiculous it would have been to advance, but not to know the enemy or anything about the enemy. Joshua sent out the spies; they were gone for 3–4 days. When they returned, Joshua sent his men through the camp telling them to get ready to move out—that is Joshua 1:10–11. Now, how are they supposed to know exactly when in three days that they would move out? The soldiers of Joshua go through the camp a second time to then explain what the sign is of them moving out would be. When the ark was picked up and moved, then the people of Israel were to advance (Joshua 3:2–3). Ex. 18:21 read: **“Furthermore, you will see out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you will place over them leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties and leaders of tens.”** When I first saw that, I thought to myself that there are a whole lot of chiefs and very few Indians. I wondered why would you need to have that much organization? However, in a situation like the Israelites in the desert, there had to be some way of disseminating orders and information. 2,000,000 is a huge population. 600,000 of them were men. It is unlikely that all 600,000 participated in battle, but they were involved in movement. Now, a colonel would have the command of thousands, then they would have authority over 2000–4000 men, perhaps. That gives us 200—and perhaps fewer—colonels. Joshua and Caleb; or, perhaps, twelve men, one from each tribe, had a command over these 200 and disseminated orders to these colonels. The 200 colonels did not speak to these thousands of men—they spoke to those who were captains over hundreds. A colonel might have commanded 3000 men, and so over them and under the colonel would be several captains. A captain would have charge of hundreds of men (let's say, 300). So this colonel would convey the orders to his ten captains. Under a captain would be two to five lieutenants, each of whom had the command over 50–150 men. Under them, and over 10–20 men each would be a sergeant. Each lieutenant would give orders to 5–10 sergeants and those sergeants would speak to the men directly. So, Joshua was commander in chief over all the divisions of his crack army. He either spoke directly to 200 colonels or put that in the hands of 12 men, one from every tribe. These colonels go out and speak to their ten captains. Each captain then gathers his five lieutenants and gives them marching orders. Then each lieutenant meets with his ten sergeants and gives them marching orders. Then the sergeants speak directly to the people (or, at least to the males who are of age). So, every hour, or even every half hour, there is a meeting which is held. We have perhaps six sets of meetings being held over a period of perhaps 6 hours, after which the entire population has been informed of their expected movement. The first time that this was done, it perhaps took a day. The second time it was done, perhaps half a day. Only through something which is highly organized could a movement of the entire Israelite camp in a three day period of time be possible. We have been given the organization for the tribes in general and where they would be stationed with respect to the ark of the covenant. The implication is that they were even more organized than that. Certainly within each tribe there was a further organization which was every bit as precise as the overall stationing of the tribes. When the colonels had been called out for their marching orders, the other officers knew that they had to be very visible and ready to complete their part of the organization.

I will give you my own personal preference—I would feel better if the population was divided by 10—that is, that the population of Israel was 200,000 rather than 2,000,000. That would give us 60,000 men, many of whom would make up Israel's army. To me, numbers like these would be easier to grasp. However, apart from any evidence to the contrary (I have read other explanations which allowed for Israel to be smaller and all of them come up short), we will have to assume that there were 2,000,000 people, which is a considerably large city. To me, even with the organization which is stated and implied in the Law, still moving such a huge number of people is beyond my imagination.

Then they commanded the people, to say, “In your seeing [the] ark of [the] covenant of Y^ehowah your God and the priests, the Levites carrying it, and you, [even] you will depart from your place and you will have followed after it.

Joshua
3:3

Then they commanded the people, saying, “When you see the ark of the covenant of Jehovah your God being carried by the priests and the Levites, then you will advance from your place and follow the ark.

Recall that the priests and the Levites are not equivalent groups. Aaron (and Moses) were from the tribe of Levi. The priests are descended from Aaron, although that distinction is only clearly made early on in the Law, and not much is said about it later. In this verse, some of the codices read *the priests and the Levites* (three early printed editions of the Masoretic text, the Septuagint and the Syriac). Once the people see the priests and the Levites moving out with the ark, they are to *nâçâ* (נָצָא) [pronounced *naw-SAHÇ*], which, again, means *to journey, to depart*. Strong's #5265 BDB #652. The Israelites spend three days in preparation; when, while they were moving out to the Jordan, the officers of the camp, acting on Joshua's command, given them specific marching orders. They will depart and then we have the Qal perfect of *hâlak* (הָלַךְ) [pronounced *haw-LAHK^e*], which means *to go, to come, to depart, to walk*. Recall that we have looked at this particular word several times already. Strong's #1980 (and 3212) BDB #229.

From the beginning, the Israelites followed behind the ark. **Thus they set out from the mount of Jehovah three days' journey, with the ark of the covenant of Jehovah journeying in front of them for the three days, to seek out a resting place for them** (Num. 10:33). NIV Study Bible: *[The] ark of the covenant [was] the most sacred of the tabernacle furnishings (see Ex 25:10–22). Since it signified the Lord's throne, the Lord himself went into the Jordan ahead of his people as he led them into the land of rest.*⁵ Actually, more than that, it represented Jesus Christ Himself and in following the ark, they were following Jesus Christ into the Land of Promise and into battle.

“Only, a distance will be between you and it—about 2000 cubits in the measure. You [all] will not come unto to the end that you will know the way that you will go in it, for you have not passed this way from yesterday three days ago.”

Joshua
3:4

“However, you will maintain a distance of at least 3000 feet [over a three-fifths of a mile] between yourselves and the ark of so that you will know the way to go, since you have not pass through this way ever before.”

The first word is an adverb *ʾak* (אָכ) [pronounced *ahk^e*], and it means *surely, certainly, no doubt, only, only this once*. It is often used in the restrictive sense, emphasizing what comes after over what comes before or restricting the action to what comes after as opposed to what comes before. Strong's #389 BDB #36. The second word is the word *râchôq* (רָחוֹק) [pronounced *raw-KHOHK*], and it means, as an adjective, *distant, far*; as a noun, it means *distance* (which can be a reference to time or space). Strong's #7350 BDB #935.

The amount of distance is specified by the kaph preposition, *k* (כ) [pronounced *k^e*], which usually means *like, as, according to*. However, when this is combined with numbers or measures of space or time given in round numbers, it means *about, approximately*. No Strong's # BDB #453. This is followed by the prepositional phrase *in [or, by, against] the measure*. I don't know that we really have a proper grammatical translation for this phrase.

⁵ The NIV Study Bible; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 291.

Owen renders this *in the measure*; KJV, Rotherham, NASB and Young: *by measure*; the NIV, NRSV, REB, NAB and the NJB all ignore these three words.

In the Old Testament, it was always clear that God was too holy for man. Man could not hardly approach God, even prior to the building of all of the holy furniture of the tent. “**And you will set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain will certainly be executed.’**” (Ex. 19:12). There was always this great gap between the perfection of God and the imperfection of man. For the most part, the ark of the covenant was kept in the Holy of Holies, in the tabernacle, wherein no man went save the High Priest once a year. A copy of the Law was kept in or beside the ark to indicate how man had fallen short of God’s perfection. The High Priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement and he sprinkled blood on the ark, signifying the atoning work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. What man waited for was the bridge between man and God’s perfect holiness. **Since therefore, brothers, we have confidence with reference to access the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water** (Heb. 10:19–22).

Barnes: *The ark, which was since the making of the Covenant the special shrine and sea of God’s Presence, went before to show the people that God, through its medium, was their leader. They were to follow at a distance that they might the better observe and mark how the miracle was accomplished. This they would do to the greatest advantage whilst coming down the heights, the ark going on before them into the ravine.*⁶

What they are told not to do is the Qal imperfect of the very common verb *bô`* (בּוֹא) [pronounced *boh*], which means *to come in, to come, to go in, to go*. Strong’s #935 BDB #97. We then have the prepositional phrase *unto it*, followed by the conjunction *l°ma’an* (לְמַעַן) [pronounced *l°MAH-gahn*], which means *for the sake of, on account of, to the intent of, to the intent that, to the purpose that, in order that*. This preposition emphasizes the cause or purpose of the action. Strong’s #4616 BDB #775. This is followed by the relative pronoun *’asher* (אֲשֶׁר) [pronounced *ash-ER*], which generally means *that, which, when or who*. Strong’s #834 BDB #81. Together, they mean *to the end that*.

What follows is *you will know the way that you will go into it*; the final suffix in that phrase is in the feminine singular, referring to the land. The Israelites, apart from the two spies, have never gone into the land before; therefore, they will follow the ark, which represents Jesus Christ. The analogy to our life here on earth should be obvious. We follow Jesus Christ in our lives, in a path that we have not gone along before.

The last phrase is: *for you have not passed in the way*; and this is followed by a preposition and two adverbs, which Owen, the NIV and the NASB simply render these words *before*; the KJV, Rotherham and Young: *heretofore*. The preposition is *mîn* (*from, out from, out of*) and the first word is the adverb *t°môwl* (תְּמוֹל) [pronounced *t°MOHL*], which means *yesterday*; and is used figuratively for *recently, formerly*. Strong’s #8543 and Strong’s #865 BDB #1069. The last word is *shil°shôwm* (שָׁלוֹשׁ יָמִים) [pronounced *shil-SHOHM*], which means *three days ago, the day before yesterday*. Strong’s #8032 BDB #1026. Literally, we have *from yesterday three days ago*; figuratively, we might say *the last couple of three days*; it is idiomatic for *at any time before, in the past, heretofore, before*. So far, these three words have been one of the most difficult things found in this book. Herein was the practical reason for this distance of over a half mile between the people and the ark. Had the procession of Israelites been within a few feet of the ark, then only a handful of people would actually be able to see the ark and its movement. At a distance of a half mile, the procession of the ark was still in view, and by a maximum of people. Although the Old Testament is filled with shadows of things to come, many of the rituals and articles of furniture representing that which had not yet occurred, there was always a practicality in the commands of God. We have found that throughout the Pentateuch.

Although the NIV describes this as a line of march, we must understand that the Israelites did not proceed in a line five people thick, or even ten people thick. The ark went first and the Israelites fell in behind it on both sides

⁶ Barnes’ Notes, Baker Books, ©1996; Vol. II, p. 357.

for miles. The ark of the Lord led the entire army into the Land of Promise. Israel was a theocracy, led by their God, the God of the Universe.

Now let me give you some practical reasons why the Israelites were to stand over a half mile behind and on both sides of the ark: we have two million people here, of which perhaps only a few ten-thousand would be standing close enough to see the ark. The deal is this—at much more than a half mile away, no one could even see the ark. This distance afforded the minimal distance so that it could be still seen and the maximum distance possible in order for the most people to see the ark. The rest just fell in behind them.

I also need to deal with another practicality—as you no doubt know, thousands of people feel that the Bible is riddled with contradictions and impossibilities and some even point to this passage in order to support their notions. They see a contradiction if everyone stands a half mile from the ark, but, at the same time, are on the shore. Certainly, this would be a glaring contradiction if the book of Joshua stated that everyone was standing right on the shoreline and the ark was a little ways out in the water—there is no way, under those circumstances, that it could be over a half mile away. However, just because the Bible says that these people have stopped on the short of the Jordan to rest, it does not mean each and every Israelite is standing on the shoreline—that is ignorant. Obviously, they are close enough to the shore to see it and far enough from the ark for it to be a half mile away.

Then said Joshua unto the people, “Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow Y^howah will do in your midst wonders.”

Joshua
3:5

Then Joshua said to the people, “Set yourselves apart to God for tomorrow, Jehovah will do great wonders in your midst.”

What Joshua tells the people to do is the Hithpael imperative of qâdash (שׁוּׁׁ) [pronounced *kaw-DAHSH*], which means *to consecrate, to sanctify, to dedicate, to hallow*. Any of these words are good translations, particularly *consecrate*, however, unless you have been going to church for a long time or speak old English fluently, it doesn't mean much to you. This verb means that something is set apart to God; this something takes on the quality of being sacred, holy, different from that which is tied to the earth. Strong's 6942 BDB #872. The Hithpael is the intensive reflexive. Here, they act upon themselves. **Jehovah also said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day Jehovah will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.”** (Ex. 19:10–11). Now, recall how there must be a distance between the people and the ark? **“And you will set boundaries for the people all around, saying, ‘Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain will be executed.’”** (Ex. 19:12). There are two views here: (1) the people washed their garments and abstained from sexual relations (Ex. 19:14–15); or, (2) they sanctified themselves by rebounding as per I John 1:9—they named their sins to God. The former was an outward sign only. Keil and Delitzsch indicate that there was not enough time for the washing of the garments, although they imply that it was possible to change their clothes as an act of purification, as per Gen. 35:2. They offer that a true sanctification would be a *spiritual purification...turning the heart to God, in faith and trust in His promise, and in willing obedience to His commandments, that they should lay to heart in a proper way the miracle of grace which the Lord was about to work in the midst of them and on their behalf on the following day.*⁷ It's a tough call for that period of time, as the average believer did not participate in the plan of God as we do today. We look to Moses or to King David or to Paul as spiritual heroes but our life, as quiet as it might be, has equivalent meaning today. Every believer is a priest today, every believer is filled with the Spirit through rebound, every believer has a spiritual gift. The believer back then could be in fellowship or not, but very few of them had the Holy Spirit; very few of them had a spiritual gift. Apart from a leader and considerable guidance, they could not choose correctly the path to take. They required a Moses or a Joshua. They could not function apart from such leadership. You need doctrine, which means you need a pastor teacher—but you don't need counseling, you don't need someone in front of you telling you what your every move should be, you don't need continual guidance by man. Remove Joshua from this picture and you have just a crowd milling about. Remove your pastor teacher from your periphery and your life still has meaning and definition; you still have a purpose. This does not mean that you can function apart from

⁷ Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, p. 31.

your pastor teacher—and you certainly cannot function long without doctrine—but if your soul is filled with doctrine and you have been filled with the Holy Spirit, then your life is as meaningful as the life of any other saint. In other words, I don't know that I am going to take a stand here on exactly what they did by way of purifying themselves—but I do know how you can purify yourself; you simply name your sins to God.

The last word is the feminine plural, Niphal participle of *pâlâ`* (אָ לָּ אָ) [pronounced *paw-LAW*] which is usually used in the Niphal in conjunction with God performing or doing marvelous and miraculous things (e.g., Ex. 3:20 34:10). It means *to do that which is extraordinary, extraordinary phenomenon (-na is plural), to do that which is unusually difficult*; the standard pansy rendering being *marvels, wonders*. It is used here as a noun. Strong's #6381 BDB #810.

Now I want you to re-read what God actually said to Joshua: “Moses, My servant, is dead; now therefore, arise, cross over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun, will be your territory. No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you. I will not fail you and I will not forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you will give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only, be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you will have success wherever you go. This book of the Law will not depart from your mouth, but you will study it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it, for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for Jehovah your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:2–9). Notice what is missing—God has not said even a word about signs and wonders, not one word. He spoke to Joshua several times about the importance of learning and obeying His Word; He spoke to Joshua at least twice about being strong and courageous. But God did not tell Joshua that they were going to witness any great wonders. Now, it is possible that we are getting an edited version of what God said to Joshua, but, if that were the case, I doubt that we would have seen as much repetition as we did. Joshua has concluded on the basis of what Israel faced, on the basis of what God had commanded them to do, on the basis of the Word of God, and on the basis of what he had seen and heard before, that the Israelites were going to cross over the Jordan and take the land following a series of miracles or spectacular events. As we have seen, by his vocabulary, Joshua is not a brilliant man like Moses. What he has is faith and understanding of God's Word. God will not command us to do what we cannot do. If God has commanded Joshua to take his people into the Land of Promise, then God must provide the means to do so. Joshua has another reason why he knows that God will do extraordinary feats before the people; God has told him this: “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, so I will be with you.” (Joshua 3:7b).⁸

Then said Joshua unto the priests, to say, “Lift up [the] ark of the covenant and pass through before faces of the people.” So they lifted up [the] ark of the covenant and went before faces of the people.

Joshua
3:6

The Joshua said to the priests, “Lift up the ark of the covenant and pass through in the sight of the people.” So they lifted up the ark of the covenant and walked in the sight of the people.

Here, we have the lamed prefixed preposition and the word for *faces*; together, they mean *in the presence of, in the sight of, before your face*.

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⁸ Certainly I realize that v. 7 follows v. 5; however, as I will continually point out, Joshua is recalling this years later and his memory arranges things topically rather than chronologically.

God Speaks to Joshua

Then Y^ehowah said unto Joshua, “The day the this I will begin to magnify you in [the] eyes of all of Israel that they will know that as I was with Moses, I will be with you. Joshua 3:7

The Jehovah said to Joshua, “On this day, I will exalt you in the sight of all Israel so that they will know that I am with you as I was with Moses.

God’s vocabulary is slightly more complex than the one employed by Joshua, but not exceedingly so. Whereas, Joshua was using words over and over again, God uses words for which there are several connotations or shades of meaning. We have two different words rendered *that* in this verse: **The Y^ehowah said unto Joshua, “The day the this I will begin to magnify you in [the] eyes of all Israel that [relative pronoun] they will know that [the explanatory conjunction] as which [relative pronoun] I was with Moses, I will be with you.”** The deal is that God still has to communicate to Joshua, so God must use a vocabulary that Joshua can grasp, so the vocabulary is not too dissimilar.

God’s promise to Joshua was simple: God had made it clear that Moses was His appointed ruler over Israel outside of the land. God had already told Joshua, **“No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you. I will not fail you or forsake you.”** (Joshua 1:5). Similarly, God will make it clear that Joshua is His ruler over Israel in the land. **On that day, Jehovah exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, so they revered him, just as they had revered Moses all the days of his life** (Joshua 4:14). Thieme: *Experience is not the secret of victory, but grace is.*⁹ NIV Study Bible: *a prime objective for the divine intervention at the Jordan was to validate the leadership of Joshua. With a miraculous even so much like that of the “Red Sea” crossing, Joshua’s position as the Lord’s servant would be shown to be comparable to that of Moses.*¹⁰ We have become totally confused about identifying God’s man. In the Old Testament and in the early church, God established His authority in a man through whom He performed incredible feats and astonishing miracles. Moses, before the court of Pharaoh, performed miracle after miracle, identifying him with God (even though Pharaoh and his court rejected Moses as a man from God). Also before the people of Israel, Moses did many incredible miracles, albeit, not an uncountable number. We are speaking of roughly a dozen miracles. Furthermore, these were feats which often appeared miraculous and there was no doubting that God was behind them. And our Lord performed almost an uncountable number of miracles and established His authority and His link with God the Father. What is important here is that Moses and Joshua were both taking command of a group of very unruly, hard-headed Israelites who had to be convinced of even the most obvious. They were both instrumental in establishing the nation Israel. Therefore, God performed incredible works through them. When our Lord walked this earth, He had brought the kingdom of God to this earth, to be accepted or rejected. Through hundreds, if not thousands of miracles, performed before the people of Israel who had never before seen such things, He established His Messiahship. Barnes: *One cause why the miracle now to be narrated was wrought is here suggested. As Moses was declared to be sent immediately from God with an extraordinary commission by the miracles which he worked, more especially that of dividing the Red Sea in two parts, so was Joshua both sent and accredited in a like manner.*¹¹

On the other hand, we don’t see such a thing when a new man takes over the pulpit somewhere. It would be foolish for the congregation to look to a new pastor to see if he could perform incredible and unquestionable miracles. And, although we have a handful of Satanic *miracles* which have occurred in some churches, we don’t have any third-party observed and tested miracles. That is, we don’t have a skeptic with an objective set of measures following a modern healer around healing to verify his so-called *miraculous* powers. Furthermore, that is not how we are to identify those who are of the faith or not. John carefully explains: **Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but analyze the spirits to see whether he is from God, because there are many false prophets gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in**

⁹ R.B. Thieme, 1962 Joshua, lesson #4.

¹⁰ *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 292.

¹¹ *Barnes’ Notes*, Baker Books, ©1996; Vol. II, p. 357.

the flesh is from God and every spirit that does not confess Jessu is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that he is coming and now it is already in the world (I John 4:1–3). No longer do we automatically assume that those who can perform apparent miracles are from God. **And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming—the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders and with all the deception of wickedness, for those who perish because they did not receive the love of the truth, so as to be saved** (II Thess. 2:8–11). The key in the dispensation of the church is not miracles and signs but doctrine. **Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard** (I John 2:7). In other words, signs and miraculous wonders, whether apparent or real, do not indicate that a man is from God—the key is the doctrine. **We are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by the craftiness of their scheming** (Eph. 4:14). Now I urge you, brothers, to keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances, contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them (Rom. 16:17). In pointing out these things to the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following (I Tim. 4:6). And what does Paul tell the pastor Timothy to do? Does he tell him to run around the church and slay everyone in the Spirit? Does Paul tell him to visit the sick? Is Timothy supposed to lay hands on everyone and heal them and then present the gospel? Just what is Timothy supposed to do as a pastor? **Until I return, give attention to the exegesis [of Scripture], to exhortation and to teaching. Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you [the gift of pastor-teacher], which was bestowed upon you by means of prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the ministers. Take pains with these things to be in them, so that your progress may be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this, you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you** (I Tim. 4:13–16). To the pastor, Titus, Paul wrote: **But, as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine...in all things, show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, in order that the opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us** (Titus 2:1, 7–8).

Later, we will move into the book of Judges, we will see that God's man is chosen, but it is not as clear-cut as Moses and Joshua.

“And you [even] you will command the priests, bearers of [the] ark of the covenant, to say, ‘As you come upon waters of the Jordan, by the Jordan, you will remain [standing still].’ “

Joshua
3:8

“And you will specifically command the priests, those carrying the ark of the covenant, saying, ‘When you come to the waters of the Jordan, you will halt at the Jordan.’ “

The priests are those who represent man to God. Having any sort of rulership over the priests is a great responsibility. God duplicated two major signs to the two generations of Israel. When they were thirsty, God gave both generations water from a rock; and when they stood at the brink of a river that they needed to cross, God parted the waters for them. The first word in the quotation from Joshua to the priests will be the preposition kaph or k^e (כ) [pronounced k^e], which means *like, as, according to*. No Strong's # BDB #453. The final verb is the Qal imperfect of 'amad (אָמַד) [pronounced gaw-MAHD], which means *to take a stand, to stand, to remain, to endure*. Strong's #5975 BDB #763. The Israelites would be delivered by standing still. There are a lot of church groups that emphasize doing things but a great deal of life is sitting back and letting God do the work. How do you know when you should act and when you should stand back? That comes through doctrine.

The priest play a most important place in the guidance of Israel. The first people across the Jordan will not be Joshua's most crack division, but it will be the spiritual leaders, the priests. God first sees the priests and then allows everyone else across. It is the spiritual leadership who should lead us, not our political leaders. And don't become confused—I am not calling for Christians in politics, for Christians to hold political office, or for Christians to become intensely politically involved or anything like that; nor am I saying that it is incorrect to become politically involved. Your leadership should be those who impart to you spiritual information). Joshua instructed his people to follow their spiritual leaders—not the political leaders—of Israel.

So here we have the priests standing with their feet in the water, holding aloft the ark of God. J. Vernon McGee describes the Jordan thus: *The Jordan is a quiet little stream in the summertime, but it is a rushing torrent during the rainy season.*¹² The people are watching from afar, those who can see (which is going to be several thousand). They observe the priests with their feet in the water and the water is raging across. Where the priests are standing, anyone could stand upright, but that is on the eastern shore; a few more feet further in, and no one could ford the river except by swimming. And God has made it clear that they are going to walk across with their families and their animals.

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Joshua Describes What Will Happen to the People

So Joshua said unto sons of Israel, "Come here and hear words of Y^ehowah your God." Joshua 3:9

So Joshua said to the sons of Israel, "Come nearer and hear the words of Jehovah your God."

Joshua returns to a simpler vocabulary, beginning with the Qal imperative of *nâgash* (נָגַשׁ) [pronounced *naw-GASH*] which means *come near, draw near, approach, come hither*. The priests are to come near. Strong's #5066 BDB #620. The accompanying adverb is *hênnâh* (הֵנָּה) [pronounced *HAYN-naw*], which means *hither, here*. Strong's #2008 BDB #244. Both verbs in this verse are in the imperative. This should be the call of every pastor to his congregation: **"Come near and hear the words of Jehovah your God."**

Then Joshua said, "In this you will know that a God of living [is] in your midst; and [in] a dispossession, He will dispossess from before your faces the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites." Joshua 3:10

Then Joshua told them, "This is how you will know that the Living God is among you: right before your very faces He will without fail dispossess the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites and the Jebusites."

the first thing that Joshua says is the *bêyth* preposition and the demonstrative feminine singular adjective *zeh* (זֶה) [pronounced *zeh*], which means *here, this*. Strong's #2063, 2088, 2090 BDB #260. Together, they mean *in this [place], here, with this, on these conditions, herewith, thus provided, by this, through this, for this cause, in this manner*. Then we have that oft-repeated phrase in the Greek and Hebrew: *you will know*. God provided us with a lush and rich Word for a reason. If all we needed to know was four spiritual laws, then the Bible would have been a page thick. The next phrase is literally *a God of living*; we would better understand this as *a living God*. The peoples of the land of Canaan had gods; but they were gods which had been created by man's hands. The Living God is then said to be *in your midst*.

NIV Study Bible: *The manner by which God is about to bring Israel across the Jordan River, the watery boundary of the promised land, will bring assurance that the one true God is with them and that he will surely dislodge the present inhabitants of Canaan. Two fundamental issues are at stake: 1. who is the true and mighty God—the God of Israel or the god on whom the Canaanites depend (Baal, who was believed to reign as king among the gods because he had triumphed over the sea-god)? By opening the way through the flooded Jordan the Lord would show both Israel and the Canaanites that he is Lord over the waters (as he was at the "Red Sea," at the flood and at creation) and that he is able to establish his own order in the world...2. Who has the rightful claim to the land—the Lord or the Canaanites?..By passing safely through the Jordan at the head of his army the Lord showed the rightness of his claim on the land. In the ancient Near East a common way for obtaining the judicial verdict of the gods was*

¹² J. Vernon McGee, *Joshua Judges*, ©1976 by Thru the Bible Books; p. 39.

by compelling the accused to submit to trial by water ordeal. Usually this involved casting him into a river (if the accused drowned, the gods had found him guilty; if not, the gods had declared him innocent). In Israel, however, another form of water ordeal was practiced (see Nu. 5:16–28). Significantly, the Lord would enter the Jordan first and then remain there until his whole army had crossed safely over. Thus his claim to the land was vindicated before the eyes of all who heard about it. And it was his claim, not Israel's; she came through the Jordan only with him and as his army, "baptized" to his service.¹³

We find the God of Israel referred to as *the Living God* throughout Scripture. “For who is there of all flesh, who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire and lived?” (Deut. 5:26). When Joshua taunted Israel, daring any man to battle him alone, said, “What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?” (I Sam. 17:26b). Jehovah lives and blessed by my Rock; and exalted be the God of my salvation; the God Who executes vengeance for me, and subdues peoples under me (Psalm 18:46–47). But Jehovah is the true God; He is the living God and the Everlasting King; at His wrath the earth quakes and the nations cannot endure His indignation (Isa. 10:10). Darius, the king over Persia, said, “I will make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; For He is the living God and endures forever, and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed. And His dominion is forever.” (Dan. 6:26). Recall Simon Peter's confession of faith to our Lord: **And Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.”** (Matt. 16:16). **For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God** (I Thess. 1:9; see also I Sam. 17:36 I Kings 19:4, 16 Psalm 42:2 84:2 Isa. 37:4 Jer. 23:36 Hosea 1:10). Every nation had a *national god*, if not several, and the liberal thought then, as he does today, that one nation god was no different than any other national god. The conservative, of course, held to the god of his country. God chose to re-enter history as a God of a particular people, beginning with one man, Abraham, and remaining with him until Abraham became a great nation. The Living God was (and is) the God of Israel. He is distinguished from the other gods inasmuch as He is Alive and the True God of the Universe; He is the Creator of the Earth and the Giver of Life to all mankind. Every other national god was built of stone or wood and had no more power than the materials out of which he was made. The national gods are dead idols. The other national gods were the creation of man's hands, and not vice versa. Certainly, behind each man-created god there stood a demon, if not several demons—but they stand convicted and destined to be thrown into the Lake of Fire forever and ever. So they are dead gods walking.

The next couple of verbs are actually moderately difficult. Let's look at a few renderings here:

<i>The Amplified Bible</i>	...and that He will surely drive out from before you...
<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	...and that he will certainly dispossess from before you...
NASB	...and that He will assuredly dispossess from before you...
NKJV	...and <i>that</i> He will without fail drive out from before you...
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	...and He doth certainly dispossess from before you...

We begin this phrase with the wâw conjunction and then the Hiphil infinitive absolute of yârash (יָרַשׁ) [pronounced *yaw-RAHSH*] means *to possess, to take possession of, to occupy [all] geographical area—by driving out the previous occupants, to inherit, to dispossess*. Strong's #3423 BDB #439. The Hiphil infinitive absolute presents a verb in the active voice with causative action, used as a verbal noun, generally used as a complement of affirmation. This is followed by the 3rd person, masculine singular Hiphil imperfect of the same verb. When two verbs are strung together like this, it indicates certain future action.

The Canaanites were descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham, the grandson of Noah. Noah had even cursed him (Gen. 9:18, 22–27). From Canaan, we have the tribes of the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, and the Hivites (Gen. 10:15–19). The Hittites were descendants of Heth, a son of Canaan (Gen. 10:15). Their empire was generally north of Canaan, but apparently some of them had settled in the central portion of the land. The Hivites, also descendants of Canaan, appear to have lived in the hill country of Lebanon

¹³ *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 292.

(Gen. 10:17 Judges 3:3). It is possible that these are the same people as the Horites. We appear to know the least about the Perizzites, who are probably not a branch of the Canaanites. They appear to be hill-dwellers. We also know very little about the Girgashites, although they seem to be well-attested to in extra-Biblical sources (e.g., the N Canaanite Ugait from the 14th-13th centuries BC). The Amorites lives on both sides of the Jordan in the hill country and were, for awhile, allied with Abraham. These were a desert people who were not acquainted with life in the city, houses, government. For that reason, they tended to be antinomian. The Israelites had already defeated two Amorite kings, Sihon of Heshbon and Og of Bashan. The Jebusites are descended from the 3rd son of Canaan and dwelt in the hill country around Jerusalem.¹⁴

This was first prophesied early on soon after the Israelites left Egypt: **“And I will send an angel before you and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite.”** (Ex. 33:2). In Paul’s first recorded speech during his first missionary journey, he spoke of the conquest of Canaan: **“And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance—about 450 years. And after these things, He gave judges until Samuel the prophet.”** (Acts 13:19–20).

“Behold, [the] ark of the covenant—a Lord [or, sovereign] of all the earth passing over before your faces up to [or, into] the Jordan.

Joshua
3:11

“Look, the ark of the covenant; the Lord of all the earth passing before you up into the Jordan River.

Covenant is not in the construct, so I did not render this as *covenant of the Lord* as did Young, Rotherham, the NASB and most everyone else. However, according to Owen and Zodhiates, we do not have a construct here. The word *Lord* is the masculine substantive ʾādôwn (אֲדֹנָי) [pronounced *aw-DOHN*], which is the word we know as *adonai* (when this word has a first person singular suffix, it is ʾādônây (אֲדֹנָיִךְ) [pronounced *ah-doh-NI*]). It means *lord, master, owner, superior, sovereign*. It is a word used of both man and God; and here of God. Strong’s #113 BDB #10. He is sovereign over all the ʾerets (אֶרֶץ) [pronounced *EH-rets*], which means *earth (all or a portion), land, ground, region*. In this context, it would be Lord of the earth. Strong’s #776 BDB #75 (cp Strong’s #127 BDB #9). The God of Israel is many times referred to as God over all the earth. **“Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you will be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine.”** (Ex. 19:5). **“Listen, to Jehovah your God belongs heaven and the highest heavens, the earth, and all that is in it.”** (Deut. 10:14).

The ark of the covenant is associated so closely with God, that it represents God, not as an idol to be worshiped, but as a thing which commands great respect. As we will recall, in our study of the ark of the covenant, that it represents our Lord Jesus Christ and His death on our behalf. No act under heaven deserves more respect. We are completely undeserving of such love.

There is a play on words here which we miss entirely. The word for *Lord* (or, *sovereign*) is ʾādôwn (אֲדֹנָי) [pronounced *aw-DOHN*] and the word for *ark* is ʾărôwn (אֲרוֹן) [pronounced *uh-ROHN*]. Strong’s #727 BDB #75. This is not some clever play on word which Joshua has thought up; it was set up that way from ages past.

After *passing over before your faces*, we have the bêyth preposition; b° (ב) [pronounced *b’*], and it denotes proximity. It is translated *in, among, into, against, with, at, through, by*. It is broken down by Gesenius into four general classes, the 4th referring to motion to a place; here, it means *to, unto, upon, up to*. The question one might ask is *how is this different from ʾel?* ʾEl denotes the action of movement to a place, or toward a place; bêyth indicates that we have arrived or that we have not arrived; we have reached the end and that is where we are. No Strong’s # BDB #88. Keil and Delitzsch: *The expression “passeth over before you into Jordan,” is more precisely explained in the course of the narrative: the ark of the covenant went (was carried) before the people*

¹⁴ Most of this information came from *The New Bible Dictionary*; edited by J.D. Douglas; ©1962 by the Inter-Varsity Fellowship; Pub. By Eerdmans Publishing Co.; contributor. The NIV Study Bible has several references at this point as well.

into the river, and then stood still, as the bulwark of the people, till the passage was completed; so that the word “before” indicates the protection which it would afford.¹⁵

As Moses had promised: “It is Jehovah your God Who will cross ahead of you; He will destroy these nations before you, and you will dispossess them. Joshua is the one who will cross ahead of you, just as Jehovah has spoken.” (Deut. 31:3). “Know therefore today that it is Jehovah your God who is crossing over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you, so that you may drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as Jehovah has spoken to you.” (Deut. 9:3).

“And now, take to yourselves twelve men from tribes of Israel, man one, one man from the tribe.

Joshua
3:12

“Now, set aside twelve men, one man from each tribe of Israel.

This verse begins with the wâw conjunction and the adverb ʿattâh (עַתָּה) [pronounced *gah-t-TAWH*], and it is an adverb of time meaning *now*. When this adverb is used with the imperative, it implies that the time has come for this exhortation or advice to be followed. Strong’s #6258 BDB #773. Let’s see how others have translated this verse:

The Amplified Bible

So now take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe.

The Emphasized Bible

Now therefore, take you twelve men, out of the tribes of Israel,—one man severally for each tribe;

Young’s Lit. Translation

...and now, take for you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, one man—one man for a tribe;

Literally, what we have is: “And now take to yourselves two of ten men out from tribes of Israel—man one; man one for the tribe.” *Two of ten* is obviously *twelve*. We are used to seeing *one man* rather than *man one* (unless we are watching a homicide drama). This is a Hebraism for taking one man from each tribe of Israel. We will not see the purpose of doing this until we get to next chapter. So Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the sons of Israel, one man from each tribe; and Joshua said to them, “Cross again to the ark of Jehovah your God into the middle of the Jordan and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel. Let this be a sign among you, so that when your children ask later, saying, ‘What do these stones means to you?’ then you will say to them, ‘Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of Jehovah; when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.’ So these stones will become a memorial o the sons of Israel forever.” (Joshua 4:4–7). Joshua gives these instructions in response to a command from God. In first choosing the men, we do not know if this is generally chronological, in which case Joshua anticipated that God would use one man from each tribe; or whether Joshua 4 expands upon the reason for this command, which was given after God’s command of Joshua in Joshua 4:1–3. In any case, this seems somewhat out of place, even though Joshua certainly is not recording these things chronologically. Logically, this verse belongs between Joshua 4:3 and 4:4. However, it is my thinking that Joshua anticipated God’s command. Joshua 4 begins as if a new message from God. Joshua certainly knew that something would be done as a memorial to the twelve tribes crossing over the river, and the Israelites have already made altars of uncut stones (Deut. 27:6).

“And it will have come to pass as a resting of soles of feet of the priests—[the ones] bearing an ark of Y^ehowah, a Sovereign of all of the earth, in waters of the Jordan—waters of the Jordan will be cut off—the waters those going down from above and they will remain one heap.”

Joshua
3:13

“And it will come to pass when the priests—the ones who bear the ark of Jehovah, the Sovereign over all the earth—bring their feet to rest in the waters of the Jordan, then those waters will be cut off. The water from upstream will stop and stand in one heap.”

¹⁵ Keil & Delitzsch’s *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, p. 33.

We have the Qal infinitive construct of *nûwach* (נִוַּח) [pronounced *NOO-ahk*], which means *rest, cause to rest, set down, lay down, deposit, leave*. Strong's #5117 (and #3240) BDB #628.

Later, we have the masculine plural construct of the Qal active participle of *nâsâ'* (נָשְׂאוּ) [pronounced *naw-SAW*], which means *to take up, to lift up*. Strong #5375 (and Strong's #4984) BDB #669. Here, it acts as a descriptive noun: *the ones bearing up the ark of Jehovah*.

The first verb with *waters of the Jordan* is the Niphal imperfect of *kârath* (קָרַח) [pronounced *kaw-RAHTH*], which means *cut off, cut down*. Strong's #3772 BDB #503. In the next line, *waters* is described by the definite article and the Qal active participle of *yârad* (יָרַד) [pronounced *yaw-RAHD*], which means *to descend, to go down*. Strong's #3381 BDB #432. Then we have two prepositions, *mîn* and *lamed*, and the adverb *ma'al* (מֵעַל) [pronounced *MAH-ġahl*], which means *the upper part*. This adverb is only found with prefixes and suffixes, and here means *from above*. So it is translated by NASB, Young and Rotherham. Strong's #4605 BDB #751. This sounds like rain, but what is being referred to is the water upstream.

The last phrase has the 3rd person masculine plural of *'âmad* (עָמַד) [pronounced *ġaw-MAHD*], which means *to take a stand, to stand, to remain, to endure*. Strong's #5975 BDB #763. This is followed by the noun *nêd* (נֵד) [pronounced *nade*], which means *a heap* (of waters). Strong's #5067 BDB #622.

The second generation gets to see what the first generation saw. However, they will respond in faith rather than with unbelief. They saw the water given from the rock, just as their fathers had seen years prior. They will see the water of a tremendous river be halted upstream from them, stand in a heap, as it were, so that they can pass over dry shod. As young people, the sons of Israel had crossed over the Sea of Reeds *dry shod*, but likely that was so long ago that it was not fully appreciated. Being the children, they would not have been placed anywhere near the wall of water. Being that there were 2,000,000 who crossed the sea of reeds, the children were probably not front row center, but hustled through by their parents. This time, they are adults, and will get the full impact of crossing a river stopped by God. Also, if the two spies forded the river, why couldn't all of Israel? Simply because there were too many of them.

Now, I want you to grasp what has happened. Joshua is a very methodical person. He has a limited vocabulary, he groups events which occurred at different times together by subject matter, and he says a lot of things over and over, showing that God said to do this, then he told the people to do that, and then they did it. Here we have something which is remarkable about Joshua. He's encamped with nearly 2,000,000 people, a large city. A significant number, the wives and children of the three tribes Gad, Reuben and Manasseh, have gone north. God has told him to cross over the Jordan and to take the land. God told him to do it *now*. It is time for the harvest and the banks of the Jordan are overflowing. Two spies can get across, but there is no way that all of Israel could cross over. Not even a large army could cross over. As far as we can tell, God did NOT tell Joshua that He will stop up the waters so that they can cross the Jordan. There is no other way to get across, and since God had ordered them to cross the river, then God must provide the means of doing so. Joshua is one of the few people who crossed over the sea of reeds as an adult, dry-shod, as God heaped up the waters, so Joshua has determined that God is going to gather up the waters just as He did before. God didn't tell Joshua this; Joshua just figured it out. He doesn't even go to God and check to make certain that he's got it right. God's power and plan are routine six to Joshua. If God requires the Israelites to cross over the Jordan river, then God has to provide a way for them to do it.¹⁶

We see a boldness in Joshua that we did not see in Moses until the last month or two of his life. Moses was quite careful in his writings to identify when God was speaking and when he was speaking and Moses always gave us an idea of where he was and what he was doing. Only in his speeches in Deuteronomy did Moses suddenly speak for God. We have to be careful here, because this means that Moses was suffering from delusions, that he had become a megalomaniac or that he really spoke for God. Moses had spent the previous forty years speaking with

¹⁶ It is very possible that we got an abbreviated version of what God said back in vv. 7–8, and that God did tell Joshua that He would stop up the waters of the Jordan. However, my instinct, based upon Joshua's writing style, is that God allowed Joshua to figure it out for himself.

God, recording Scripture and growing in grace and the knowledge of God's Word to the point that he could speak ex cathedra, if you will. So that you don't take this too far, Moses wrote Scripture; he wrote the Word of God. No pope and no holy roller is writing the Word of God today. Joshua exhibits a great boldness. He has possibly appended the books of Moses already, but he certainly has not written down any Scripture since then (and it is debatable whether or not he knew he was recording Scripture even then). However, recall how he began this speech: "[Come here and hear the words of Jehovah your God.](#)" (Joshua 3:9b). Either God has told him that He was going to stop up the Jordan or Joshua was bold enough to speak for God, seeing that there was no other alternative. God has split the waters before, God has told Joshua to take his people to the other side and take the land, and, since the river was in the way, with a sea above and below, Joshua could only see one solution and that was for God to stop up the river. I personally believe that God did not tell Joshua to say this and that Joshua figured it out on his own. Joshua is greatly underrated, and part of the problem is that he followed Moses, one of the true grace super heroes of the Old Testament. No matter who followed Moses, he would have been overshadowed. Joshua carefully recorded what God said to him, did not record anything about the river being stopped up, so I believe that Joshua determined this on his own by putting 2 and 2 together. Keil and Delitzsch: *He extends the force of the miracle beyond their entrance into the land, and properly so, since there mere opening of a way into a hostile country from which there would be no retreat, would be nothing but exposure to death. For they would either easily fall, through being entangled in difficulties and in an unknown region, or they would perish through want. Joshua therefore foretold, that when God drove back the river it would be as if He had stretched out His hand to strike all the inhabitants of the land, and that the proof which He gave of His power in their crossing the Jordan would be a certain presage of victory, to be gained over all the tribes.*¹⁷ Now, don't take this ball and run with it. Don't go to the next deacons meeting, stand up, and say *this is God's will for us to do this*. Or, *God came to me in a dream and told us how we should spend this money*.

V. 13 is the end of the quote from Joshua and we now have what actually happened.

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Joshua's Words Are Fulfilled

And it came to pass in a departing of the people from their tents to cross over the Jordan and the priests carrying the ark, the covenant, before faces of the people;

Joshua
3:14

And it came to pass when the people depart from their tents to cross over the Jordan; and the priests are carrying the ark—the covenant—in the sight of the people;

The next few verses should be tied together. This is the first of several verses which can't be understood fully without what follows.

Throughout this chapter, we continually find the words *the ark, the covenant*, which most Bibles render as *the ark of the covenant*. It is not in the construct form here, or elsewhere in this chapter. The ark was a chest measuring 45"x24"x24" made of acacia wood. The wood represented the humanity of Jesus Christ. The wood was overlaid with gold, inside and out, and there was a gold molding made for it; the gold representing the deity of Jesus Christ. There were rings attached to the sides so that poles might be fitted through so that the ark could be carried without touching it. Man was not allowed to approach and touch the holiness of God. On top of this chest was a mercy seat, 45"x24", made out of pure gold, representing the mercy and love of God as manifested on the cross. Then were hammered out two cherubim who were attached to the mercy seat (or, possibly just standing upon the mercy seat), facing one another, covering the mercy seat with their wings. This represents the angelic conflict. I hesitate to say whether we are speaking of a fallen angel and an elect angel, or whether we are speaking of two elect angels, but I would lean toward the latter as they are both upon the mercy seat. The mercy seat is partially obscured from view, as the exact nature of the cross was not known until the crucifixion. God was known to be merciful and forgiving, but at the same time just. His means to forgive us and yet remain just was never fully

¹⁷ Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, pp. 32–33, footnote.

revealed in the Old Testament. After the crucifixion and the resurrection, the meaning of the cross has become clear to us who are saved by God.

The Book of the Law was placed next to the Ark. Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant¹⁸ of Jehovah, saying, “Take this book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of Jehovah your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you, for I know your rebellion and your stubbornness. Look, when I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against Jehovah; how much more then after my death?” (Deut. 31:25–27). The Law condemns us. The Law sets up a perfect standard that we cannot attain before God. **By the works of the Law, no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin** (Rom. 3:20). **For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it stands written, “Cursed is every one who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law to perform them.” Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for “The righteous man will live by faith.”** (Gal. 3:10–11 Deut. 27:26 Lev. 18:5). The Law condemns us before God—we look to the holiness of God and before Him we see the Law, which curses us.

Throughout history, we find three things added to the Ark. **For there was a tent prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand, and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. And behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense and the Ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which there was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron’s rod which budded, and the tablets of the covenant** (Heb. 9:2–4). The tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written were placed inside the Ark. **And you will place in the Ark the testimony which I give you** (Ex. 25:16). Tablet #1 had all Ten Commandments, as did tablet #2. The reason for two tablets is that when a covenant is written (this is a contract), both parties have a copy of the contract. By the plural in Heb. 9:4, and because there is no other destination given for those two tablets, both tablets were apparently placed into the Ark. Moses confirms this in Deut. 10:5: **“Then I turned and came down from the mountain, and placed the tablets into the Ark which I had made; and there they are, as Jehovah commanded me.”** The Ten Commandments show us where we have come up short before God. Also, Aaron’s rod that budded was placed into the Ark. I have been taught that represented the rebellion of man, and that is also the testimony of the Old Testament: **But Jehovah said to Moses, “Put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put an end to their grumblings against Me, so that they should not die.”** (Num. 17:10). However, there are two things in view here—Aaron’s rod that budded—a dead piece of wood which put forth buds, and blossoms and bore almonds (Num. 17:8), also represents the resurrection of man. Note that last line of v. 10: **“...so that they should not die.”** We have no life with God unless we are resurrected to eternal life. Finally, a golden jar of manna was placed into the Ark. The manna represents God’s provision for His own. Now, once a year, the priest would enter the holy of holies wherein was the Ark of God and he would sprinkle blood upon the mercy seat—and this is Christ’s blood which atones for us (His blood representing his spiritual death on our behalf; He took upon Himself the penalty for all of our sins. So you see, the Ark was fraught with meaning and it, in of itself, with its contents, was a covenant between God and man. And this is why we do not have the construct here. The Ark was the covenant between God and man.

And as [soon as] a coming of [those] carrying the Ark as far as the Jordan and feet of the priests carrying the Ark were dipped in [the] edge of the waters (and the Jordan is filled beyond all its banks all of [the] days of harvest);

Joshua
3:15

And as soon as those carrying the Ark come to the Jordan and the priest who are carrying the Ark dip their feet into the river’s edge (the Jordan is overflowing its banks during the time of harvest);

This verse begins with the wâw conjunction and the preposition kaph or k^e (כ) [pronounced k^e], which generally means *like, as, according to*. However, when this is combined with an infinitive, it can also take on the meaning *as, often, when, as soon as*. No Strong’s # BDB #453. This is followed by the masculine plural, Qal active

¹⁸ Ark is in the construct state in this passage.

participle of $b\ddot{o}^{\prime}$ (בּוֹא) [pronounced *boh*], which means *to come in, to come, to go in, to go*. Strong's #935 BDB #97. We have seen Joshua used this word repeatedly.

Prior to *the Jordan*, we have the adverb $\acute{a}d$ (אֲדַ) [pronounced $\acute{g}ad$] which means *as far as, even to, up to, until*. Strong's #5704 BDB #723. So, the priests carrying the Ark advance to the Jordan and they place their feet into the water.

The verb which goes with *feet* is the 3rd person plural, Niphal perfect of $\acute{t}a^bval$ (טָבַל) [pronounced *tawb-VAHL*], which means *to dip*. Strong's #2881 BDB #371. What they will dip their feet into is the $q\ddot{a}tseh$ (קֵצֶה) [pronounced *kaw-TSEH*], which means *end, extremity*. In this case, we are speaking of the shallow water of the shore. Strong's #7097 BDB #892. This *as soon as* from the beginning of this verse leads us into the next verse. What follows in this verse, after the dipping of the feet of the priests into the water, is parenthetical. What the NIV translation does is turn this verse around so that this first phrase is last, giving us: **Yet as soon as the priests who carried the Ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing** (Joshua 3:15b–16a, NIV). However, in the Hebrew, we have a parenthetical environmental report.

It is here that we see that we are near the end of the rainy season. The time of harvest is at hand; the rains have been and gone; and the banks of the Jordan are overflowing. This means that the crossing of the Jordan by the two spies was not an easy thing to do and there is no way that the soldiers and their families can cross over en masse. The verb attached to *the Jordan* is either the 3rd person masculine singular Qal perfect or the Qal active participle of $m\ddot{a}l\acute{e}^{\prime}$ (מָלֵא) [pronounced *maw-LAY*], which means *to fill, to make full, to be full*. It is used *to be filled* with glory, mercy, goodness, knowledge or *to fill* with anything. BDB #569; Strong's #4390. This verb is followed by the preposition $\acute{a}l$ (אֶל) [pronounced *al*], which means *upon, against, above*. When $\acute{a}l$ is used in connection with something geographical, particularly *water*; it has the connotation of *contiguity* or *proximity*; so here, it means *by* or *beyond*. Strong's #5920, #5921 BDB #752. What the water is flowing beyond is *all its* and then we have the feminine plural substantive $g\ddot{a}d\acute{a}h$ (גַּדָּה) [pronounced *gaw-DAW*], and this is the first word that I am aware of that Joshua is the first writer to use. Recall that his vocabulary is not near as rich as that of Moses or Job (or of the writers of Genesis, for the most part). So it is remarkable when we come to a word like this, which is only found here and in Joshua 4:18 | Chron. 12:15 | Isa. 8:7.* It means *banks*. Strong's #1415 BDB #152. During the spring rains and the melting of the snow Mount Hermon, the water overflowed the banks of the Jordan.¹⁹ There are several writers who have tried to make this less of a miracle by claiming that the water was right up to the banks, but a comparison of Joshua 4:18 to Isa. 8:7 indicates that Joshua's purpose here was to emphasize what a tremendous miracle this was.²⁰

Barnes gives this description: *The Jordan flows at the bottom of a deep valley, which descends to the water's edge on either side in two, occasionally in three, terraces. Within the lowest of these the stream, ordinarily less than 100 feet wide in this lower part of its course, is confined. The margin is overgrown with a jungle of tamarisks and willows, which in the spring is reached by the rising waters...and the river, occasionally at least, fills the ravine which forms its proper bed to the brim. Its highest rise takes place about the time when Joshua had to cross it. By the middle of April the river cannot be forded; and, if passed at all, can only be so by swimming. This, however, was a hazardous feat...and though no doubt performed by the two spies, was utterly out of the power of the mixed multitude that followed Joshua. The mere fact that the whole vast host crossed the stream of Jordan at this season, is no small proof of the miracle here recorded. No human agency then known and available could have transported them speedily and safely from bank to bank.*²¹

¹⁹ Barnes has the water *up to all his banks*; or *brim-full*. In either case, we have an over-abundance of flowing water.

²⁰ Joshua 4:18: **And it came to pass when the priests who carried the Ark of the covenant of Jehovah had come up from the middle of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up to the dry ground, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and went over all its banks as before.** Isa. 8:7: "Now, therefore, observe, Jehovah is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates, even the king of Assyria and all his glory; and it will rise up over all its channels and go over all its banks."

²¹ *Barnes' Notes*, Baker Books, ©1996; Vol. II, p. 358.

Keil and Delitzsch give us a rather convoluted description of this area, so let me pare it down somewhat, bringing in other sources: The Jordan River lies in a large valley called the Ghor (*Ghor* means *valley*), also called the Jordan valley. The Bashan and the Gilead hills are a part of the hills on the eastern side. This valley is perhaps 12 miles wide at its widest. There are apparently three banks of the Jordan River. The lowest is a sandy bank, only a couple of feet high, which the Jordan overflows regularly in the spring. Over this is a second bank, above which is the flood plain, which is overgrown with brush, trees and reeds and has often been almost impenetrable. Lions, tigers and wild boars live in this area until the overflowing Jordan runs them into the outlying areas. From this rises mostly sandy slopes, which rise another forty or fifty feet in some areas. Robinson visited this area in 1838 and found the even the ground where the bushes grew to be covered in water during the rainy season that year. The area near the Jericho was almost impossible to pass, the current being strong and the water being 10–12 feet deep.²²

The time period is then given as literally *all of [the] days of harvest*. During April and May, after the early (Spring) rains, the inhabitants of the land harvested grain. This timing is important. When the Israelites enter the land, manna from heaven will cease, but God will continue to provide for them. *And the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the land of Canaan during that year* (Joshua 5:12). This miracle is recounted by few people and this is one of the greatest miracles to be found in the Bible.

Then the waters were standing—those coming down from above—they had arisen one heap very far at [or, from] Adam the city which [is] beside Zarethan. And those coming down toward a sea of the Arabah toward the Salt Sea, they had become finished—they were cut off and the people crossed over opposite Jericho.

Joshua
3:16

So the waters which came down from the north came to a standstill; they had arisen in one heap quite a distance away at Adam, which is next to Zarethan. And those waters which would have flowed in the direction of the Arabah Sea and the Salt Sea—they were completely cut off and the people crossed over the Jordan.

This is a moderately difficult passage, so let me give you some other renderings:

The Amplified Bible

Then the waters which came down from above stood and rose up in a heap far off, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan; and those flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt [Dead] sea, were wholly cut off, and the people passed over opposite Jericho.

The Emphasized Bible

...that the waters which were coming down from above stood—rose in one mount a great way off by the city Adam, which is beside Zarethan, and they which were going down to the sea of the waste plain, the salt sea failed—were cut off, and the people passed over, right against Jericho.

NJB

...the upper waters stood still and formed a single mass over a great distance, at Adam, the town near Zarethan, while those flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely separated. The people crossed opposite Jericho.

REB

...the water flowing down from upstream was brought to a standstill; it piled up like a bank for along way back, as far as Adam, a town near Zarethan,. The water coming down to the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, was completely cut off, and the people crossed over opposite Jericho.

Young's Lit. Translation

...that the waters stand; those coming down from above have risen—one heap, very far above Adam the city, which *is* at the side of Zaretan; and those going down by the

²² This information was culled from Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, p. 34; *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; ©1956 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Vol. III, p. 1732–1735; *Nelson's 3-D Bible Mapbook*; Simon Jenkins; ©1985; Thomas Nelson Publishers, p. 16; and Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History Old Testament*; ©1995 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; p. 303.

sea of the plain, the Salt Sea, have been completely cut off; and the people have passed through over-against Jericho;

This verse begins with a wâw consecutive and the Qal imperfect of *to stand* (as we have seen in the previous verse). The subject is *the waters*. They are further modified by the masculine plural, Qal active particle of *yârad* (יָרַד) [pronounced *yaw-RAHD*], which means *to descend, to go down*. Strong's #3381 BDB #432. We could combine this to: *then the descending waters were standing...* This is followed by the prepositional phrase *from above*.

We then have the 3rd person plural, Qal perfect of *qûwm* (קָוַם) [pronounced *koom*], which means *to stand, to rise up*. Strong's #6965 BDB #877. Then we have the phrase *heap one* (their adjectives often follow the noun which is modified). There is no preceding preposition. Then we have the Hiphil infinitive absolute of *râchaq* (רָחַק) [pronounced *raw-KHAHK*], which means *to put at a distance, to remove, to place far away from oneself*. Strong's #7368 BDB #934. The Hiphil infinitive absolute presents a verb in the active voice with causative action, used as a verbal noun, generally used as a complement of affirmation. God has caused the waters to stand in a heap *afar off*. Young renders this *far*; Rotherham, *a way off*; NASB, *a distance away*. This word is modified by the adverb *m^eôd* (מְאֹד) [pronounced *m^e-ODE*] means *exceedingly, extremely, greatly, very*. Strong's #3966 BDB #547. How far off is given in the next phrase, which begins with the *bêyth* preposition, which denotes proximity, and therefore can be rendered *at*. Where this is, is the city of Adam. The MacMillan Bible Atlas places this not quite half way to the Sea of Galilee (or, as it was called the, the Sea of Kennereth). This is where the second largest river of that area, the Jabbok, empties into the Jordan River.

ZPEB suggests that the forty foot banks collapsed at this narrow stretch of river, temporarily damming the river Jordan.²³ The NIV Study Bible points out that as recently as 1927, there was a blockage of water in that area which occurred and stopped the flow of water for 20 hours, and they suggest that it was possible that God used natural means, such as a landslide, to block up the river.²⁴ An Arabic historian recorded that in 1266 A.D., in this same area, a landslide caused the bed of the Jordan river to be dry for ten hours.²⁵ The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia gives more detail: *An interesting parallel to the drying up of the Jordan before Joshua is recorded by an Arabic historian of the Middle Ages, who writes to explain a natural but extraordinary occurrence, without any thought of the miraculous or any apparent knowledge of the passage of the Israelites. During the years 1266–67 A.D., a Mohammedan sultan named Beybars was engaged in building a bridge over the Jordan near Damieh, a place which some have identified with the city Adam (Joshua 3:16); but the force of the waters repeatedly carried away and destroyed his work. On one night, however, in December of the latter year, the river ceased entirely to flow. The opportunity was seized, and an army of workmen so strengthened the bridge that it resisted the flood which came down upon it the next day, and stood firm. It was found that at some distance up the river, where the valley was narrow, the banks had been undermined by the running water and had fallen in, thus completely damming back the stream.*²⁶ We have similar occurrence in 1920. According to Werner Keller, an earthquake occurred in 1927, causing river banks to cave in, stopping the flow of the Jordan River for 21 hours. A similar event occurred in 1924, and, *in 1906 the Jordan became so choked up with debris as the result of an earthquake that the river bed on the lower reaches near Jericho was completely dry for twenty-four hours.*²⁷ As you know, I have no problems with *natural* explanations of the phenomena found in the Bible. To me it is a greater feat for God to have planned out in eternity past a geological disturbance which created a natural dam just on the day that He had instructed Israel to cross over the Jordan. However, that does not appear to be the description

²³ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill C. Tenney, ed.; Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976, Vol. 1; p. 56.

²⁴ *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 292.

²⁵ *The Amplified Bible*, The Lockman Foundation; ©1965 by Zondervan Publishing House; p. 261. They apparently took this from *The New Bible Commentary*. According to Werner Keller, it was 1267 A.D. Werner Keller, *The Bible as History* (second revised edition), p. 159.

²⁶ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. III; p. 1745.

²⁷ Werner Keller, *The Bible as History* (second revised edition), p. 159.

which we have here. Although I would not rule out a *natural* explanation, based upon this text, my leaning is that this was miraculous, as if God placed His hand in front of the waters at the city of Adam. And there is more to it than that—we have all of Israel traipsing across the Jordan immediately afterward. There had to be some supernatural drying of the land where they crossed (I must admit that I have no clue as to the makeup of the river soil, and some river soil can be rocky and sandy, and easy to cross). In either case, God has the power to do these things—He made the world and He has complete control over the world. Human history continues as it does in a realm of degeneracy and pain as God methodically answers all judicial questions and objections to His character and His plan. I.e., when human history is over, no one—not angels, fallen or elect, nor man, saved or unsaved—will be able to have any objections to God’s plan or their final destination in eternity. Zodhiates takes the same position and elaborates on some points: *Notice that the Lord did not stop the flow of the Jordan until the priests’ feet were actually in the water. They were called upon to exercise their faith first. The swollen condition of the Jordan River at that time of the year emphasizes god’s miraculous provision for Israel. Since irrigation now drains off much of its water, the Jordan no longer floods as it once did. Some scholars have suggested that an earthquake or landslide stopped the flow, but the text of Scripture refutes any attempt at explaining away God’s supernatural intervention. The Jordan lies in a deep valley, and so does not spread out when it is flooded. It merely goes over its normal banks, and further up the valley sides. When it is flooded, the only way to get across the water is to swim or sail, but neither of these methods would have been possible for several million Israelites with children, livestock, and household goods.*²⁸

Now, as you know, I want to look at the numbers. We have 2 million Israelites plus all of their cattle and possessions crossing roughly a 20 mile stretch of river—is this possible in a day? If the Israelites took up a width of 20 miles, that would be 105,600 ft. If each Israelite needed, say, a 5 foot berth in order to walk across, that means that, shoulder to shoulder, 5 ft. across per person, we could have as many as 21,210 people. If there are 2 million in all, that means each line would be 95 people long, roughly. So, the equivalent situation would be how long would it take 95 people in a line to walk across a 100 ft. river? It is more than reasonable to suppose that this could have all been accomplished in just a few hours, given that the Israelites used the entire width afforded them by God. Keil and Delitzsch simply state that this could have been easily accomplished in half a day if the breadth of the people was merely a mile or so across.

This might bring up another question in your mind—if God is God, why does He choose to do some things using apparent miracles and others through an unusual turn of events? That which is immediate and miraculous impresses those who observe the miracle and this was the way which God informed the public that the man performing the miracle was His man. Jesus, when His authority and person were questioned by no less than John the baptizer, said, “Go and report to John the things which you hear and see. The blind receive sight and lame walk, lepers are cleansed and deaf hear, and dead are raised up, and poor have the good news proclaimed to them.” (Matt. 11:4b–5 Isa. 35:5). The evidence of Messiahship of Jesus Christ was in His works. John the baptizer, like most Biblical scholars, expected a slightly different scenario with the coming of the Messiah, as the Scriptures meld together the first and second advents of our Lord. Therefore, John expected One Who would gather His people to the land and bring in the Millennium. When our Lord did not do these things, John was nonplused. However, it was His miracles which were offered as evidence of Who He was.

Next question, then, is why doesn’t God do everything by miracle? Why does He even bother to employ a natural course of events? There are several reasons. First of all, it shows greater intelligence to set into motion thousands upon thousands of years ago a series of events which would glorify Him and fulfill His plan. There are literally thousands of events which occur in our life which are not the result of miracles, but a result of His careful forethought and pre-planning, to the end of glorifying Him. This is why there is no sin in taking aspirin, in going to a doctor, in seeking legal advice, etc. When your computer crashes, you don’t pray over it, and then figure it is going to be alright—you seek technical assistance. There is nothing wrong with prayer to accompany that which you do. I personally work hard for the money which I have made; but I also pray for God’s guidance and provision and recognize that all that I have is a result of his gracious gifts. When a bone is broken, you seek a doctor; when a blood transfusion is required, you don’t misapply Old Testament Scripture, you allow the doctor’s to do what they deem to be the correct action in your health management. God will guide the correct doctors into your life and

²⁸ *The Complete Word Study Old Testament*; Dr. S. Zodhiates; ©1994 AMG Publishers; p. 578.

He allows you to seek second opinions and He will guide the doctor in his treatment of you. I personally had cataracts in both eyes and required operations. My corrected vision was about 20-90 and my night vision was pitiful. During a rain at night, I was afraid to drive and nervous throughout the whole ordeal. I did not pray to have my condition healed miraculously; I did not go to a healer. I discovered my condition through an eye doctor. Prior to both operations, I prayed a great deal, both for personal courage and for the skill of the doctor. When all was said and done, I had two different doctors who performed the operations; one eye was corrected to close to normal vision (I get about 20-50 or better in that eye) and the other was corrected to a reasonable reading vision, meaning that for reading normal print and for daytime activities, I may never require glasses. Considering that my uncorrected vision prior to the operation was 20-400, this was nothing short of miraculous that I could function after the operation without glasses. God had planned this in eternity past—He chose the surgeons, He saw to it that my vision would not just be better, but not require correction for most activity. This was a gracious gift from God—and He planned this for my life perhaps billions of years ago. The fact that a series of natural events culminate in His glory proves time and time again that: **All things work together for good to them who love God and are called according to His purpose** (Rom. 8:28b). This tells us that we can trust God's judgment and that we do not need to be in search of a miracle 24 hours a day in order to solve the problems in our life. Our life is not that unstable and God is not ever caught by surprise by the events in our lives, by our short comings, or by the trials that we face.

Our preposition is the prefixed bēyth, which means *in, at, against*. Some manuscripts and codices have *from Adam*.²⁹ This is the only place in Scripture which names this city. *Adam* is then called *the city which*; then we have no verb, and the masculine noun tsad (טצ) [pronounced *tzahd*], which means *side*. With the mîn preposition, it means *at the side of*. Strong's #6654 BDB #841. *Adam* is a city which has disappeared with time. The next city is *Zarethan*,³⁰ which is mentioned more often in Scripture than is the city of *Adam*. This is probably further up the Jordan from *Adam*, roughly 20 miles north-northeast of *Jericho*. *Barnes* associates it with the modern *Kurn Sartabeh* (i.e., *horn of Sartabeh*), a high, isolated hill 17 miles up the river from *Jericho*.³¹ In order for the priests to place their feet in the water and have a stoppage of water which is almost simultaneous, the water had to have been stopped several hours earlier. God may have used miraculous means to stop up the water, but the timing was based upon His perfect knowledge in eternity past of all events and when they would take place.

The next sentence begins with the wâw conjunction, the definite article, and the masculine plural, Qal active participle of yârad again, giving us *and those flowing down*. So far, we have: **Then the waters were standing those coming down from above; they had arisen one heap very far at Adam the city which [is] beside Zarethan. And those coming down...** The next preposition, ʿal (לע) [pronounced *al*], which means *upon, against, above*, Strong's #5920 & #5921 BDB #752. This is followed by *a sea of the Arabah, a sea of the Salt*; or, **...above the Arabah Sea, the Salt Sea**. The Israelites were quite close to the Salt Sea and the Arabah is the next sea to the south, below the Salt Sea. Joshua's strongest subjects appear to be geography and strategic warfare.

The next portion of this sentence begins with the 3rd person plural, Qal perfect of tam (תמ) [pronounced *tahm*], and it means *to be complete, to be finished*. Strong's #8552 BDB #1020. This is immediately followed by the Niphal perfect of kârath (קרת) [pronounced *kaw-RAHTH*], which means *cut off, cut down*. Strong's #3772 BDB #503. This is the most complex sentence structure which Joshua has used—we often render this as *they were completely cut off*, but literally, it is: *they had become finished; they had been cut off*. The final phrase is *and the people cross over opposite Jericho*. This gives us: **Then the waters were standing—those coming down from above—they had arisen one heap very far at Adam the city which [is] beside Zarethan. And those coming down toward a sea of the Arabah toward the Salt Sea, they had become finished—they were cut off and the people crossed over opposite Jericho.**

²⁹ Thomas Nelson's *The New King James Version Bible*; ©1994 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.; p. 182.

³⁰ In case you are confused as to whether this should be *Zarethan* or *Zaretan*; the letter in question is *thâv* (ת), pronounced as a *th*; with a dagesh (תּ), it is *tâv* and pronounced as a *t*. In the Hebrew, this lacks the dagesh and should have the *th* pronunciation.

³¹ *Barnes' Notes*, Baker Books, ©1996; Vol. II, p. 358.

Then the priests stood carrying the Ark, the covenant of Y^ehowah on the dry ground in a midst of the Jordan firmly and all of Israel were crossing over at the dry ground until which all the nation had finished to cross over the Jordan.

Joshua
3:17

Then, the priests, carrying the ark—the covenant of Jehovah—stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan and so all of Israel crossed over on the dry ground until the entire nation had finished crossing over the Jordan River.

Let's also see what others have done with this verse:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	And the priests who were bearing the Ark of the covenant of Yahweh stood on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan with firm footing,—while all Israel were passing over on dry ground, until all the nation had made an end of passing over the Jordan.
NAB	While all Israel crossed over on dry ground, the priests carrying the Ark of the covenant of the LORD remained motionless on dry ground in the bed of the Jordan until the whole nation had completed the passage.
NASB	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.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	...and the priests bearing the Ark of the covenant of Jehovah stand on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan—established, and all Israel are passing over on dry ground till that all the nation hath completed to pass over the Jordan.

We even have a bit of linguistic humor here that you do not catch in the English. V. 16 and 17 begin exactly the same way—with the wâw consecutive and the 3rd person masculine plural, Qal imperfect of ʿamad (אָמַד) [pronounced ʿaw-MAHD], which means *to take a stand, to stand, to remain, to endure*. Strong's #5975 BDB #763. In v. 16, the waters took a stand and in v. 17, the priests took a stand. *Waters* are modified in v. 16 by a Qal active participle and *priests* in v. 17 are modified by a Qal active participle—they are the ones *carrying the Ark*. It is generally called *the Ark of the covenant of Y^ehowah*, but *Ark* is not in the construct, so it is *the ark—the covenant of Y^ehowah*.

The next phrase is *on the dry ground in the midst of the Jordan* and then we have the Hiphil infinitive absolute of kûwn (קוּן) [pronounced koon], which means *erect (to stand up perpendicular), to establish, to prepare, to be stabilized*. In the Hiphil infinitive absolute, we could go with *firmly, established, firm*. It acts as an adverb describing their *standing*. Strong's #3559 BDB #465. It is not a leap to think of this as standing in mud, secured to the ground by the mud.

Next we have: *and all of Israel were passing over at the dry ground*, which possibly indicates the miracle of making it possible for the people to cross over the river bed. As I have mentioned, I do not know the composition of the river bed, but a recently dried river would be difficult, if not impossible, for 2 million people to cross over. This is followed by the preposition ʿad (אֲד) [pronounced ʿad] which means *as far as, up to, until, while*. Preposition: Strong's #5704 BDB #723. This is followed by the relative pronoun *which, who, that* and the 3rd person plural, Qal perfect of tam (תָּמַם) [pronounced tahm], and it means *to be complete, to be finished, to complete, to come to an end, to cease*. This is also written tāmam (תָּמַם) [pronounced tahm]. Strong's #8552 BDB #1070. This gives us *until which they came to an end*. The subject is *all of the nation* and this is followed by *to cross over the Jordan*. This gives us: *Then the priests stood carrying the Ark, the covenant of Y^ehowah on the dry ground in a midst of the Jordan firmly and all of Israel were crossing over at the dry ground until which all the nation had finished to cross over the Jordan*.

My first thought was that there was a supernatural drying of the river bed in order for Israel to cross. I don't know that that occurred or not. At first I thought that the Scripture warranted such an interpretation because the Israelites are said to walk over dry ground. This is the Hebrew word chōreb (חֹרֵב) [pronounced khoh-RE^BV], which means *extreme dryness, drought, heat*. It means *dryness* as in all absence of dew. Strong's #2721 BDB #351. This is the word which speaks of the ground onto which the priests were lifted; this is not the same

word which is used later in Joshua 4 for the dried river bed which the Israelites walked across. If the same word had been used, then we could have said unequivocally that the river bed had been dried up supernaturally. As I have said many times in the past concerning miracles, even if God had caused all of this to happen by natural means, it in no way diminishes His strength and power. We have had times in the past when earth slides have shut down the flow of the Jordan River was stopped up temporarily in 1267 A.D., 1906 and 1927. People, particularly holy rollers, are so confused about this point. If God used natural means, that means that in eternity past, prior to the creation of the world, He had to have set the plan for whatever natural dam to occur just as the Ark, carried by the priests, was taken into shallow water; and then He had to set up the plan for this natural dam to be removed or to be overflowed just as the Ark was taken out from the Jordan river bed. We have little or no appreciation for the incredible intelligence which would have to function in order for all these things to occur at the time that they occurred. You add this to an uncountable number of other natural occurrences which God set into motion for the uncountable number of *natural* miracles which have taken place since the dawn of the world, and it is totally inconceivable to our tiny minds.

We find this testified to again and again, primarily in the Psalms: [He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot; there let us rejoice in Him!](#) (Psalm 66:6). [You broke open springs and torrents; You dried up ever-flowing streams](#) (Psalm 74:15). In fact, from here, we will go to Psalm 114 first, and then return to Joshua.

Some have expressed concern that the Israelites crossed here, but then it later has them crossing the Jordan in Joshua 4:11. Let me remind you that much of Scripture were recorded after the fact, although likely by the traditional author (in this case, Joshua). When writing, you had one shot. It wasn't like working with a word processor. And the Jewish mind, in general seemed to organize its thoughts topically—so with Joshua. Once an outline has been given, an Hebrew writer will look back at the topic sentence and expand upon it. This automatically takes us away from chronological thinking and writing. However, Joshua 4 is chronological, following Joshua 3. Joshua 4:11 ([...and it came to pass when all the people had finished crossing, that the Ark of Jehovah and the Priests crossed before the people](#)) gives us somewhat of a conclusion to chapters 3 and 4 to that point.

Barnes correctly points out that this passage is fraught with meaning. From *Adam*, flowed the barrier between Israel and the provisions and promises of God. Only God could remove this barrier. Just as with us, from our father *Adam*, we have inherited the old sin nature and from him we have imputed sin, so that we are cut off from God and from His promises and provisions; and it is only through His work and His power that we can attain to His multifarious gifts. Also, keeping in mind that *Jesus* is the Greek version of *Joshua*, note that here he began his public rule and here his relationship to God is attested to by the miracle of these waters. This is the same River Jordan where our Lord was baptized over a millennium later, attesting to His entering into His public ministry. Twelve stones were chosen by the representatives of the twelve tribes to stand as a monument to this event; just as our Lord chose twelve men. That may seem like a stretch to you until you read: Rev. 21:14, which says: [And the wall of the city had twelve foundations stones, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.](#)³²

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³² These analogies are courtesy of *Barnes' Notes*, Baker Books, ©1996; Vol. II, p. 358.