

## **Dr. David Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 7**

### **Joshua 3-4**

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This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on Joshua through Ruth. This is session 7, Joshua 3-4, the Jordan Crossing.

We're now going to continue looking in this segment at Joshua chapters three and four.

So, if you have your Bibles, we'll be looking at this section and they kind of belong together. Chapter three discusses the preparations for crossing the Jordan finally from east to west. And then chapter four, end of chapter three talks about the crossing itself, and then chapter four kind of looks back and memorializes that.

So that's the thrust of these chapters and so let's look at the beginning, the instructions for the crossing. I would see, I would call the first stage of that is in chapter three verses one to six. We see at the beginning that Joshua gets up early in the morning and sets out from Shittim.

Not exactly sure of the exact location of Shittim, but it's probably within 10 miles east of the Jordan. So it wasn't that far to get down to the river to get ready to cross. So, they got to the Jordan, end of verse one, they lodged there before they passed over.

And verse two talks about the end of three days, the officers went through the camp and commanded the people with instructions about what to do when the Ark of the Covenant begins moving. Now, remember that in chapter one, verse 11, Joshua instructs the officers of the people that they are to within three days there to begin crossing the Jordan. And many scholars see these three days here is the same as those in chapter one.

My view is that they're different sets of days. So, there are three days from verse 11, then three more days, and a total of maybe six or probably seven days, actually, which might be itself kind of symbolic preparations for crossing the Jordan in seven days or six days plus one. The language in chapter one, verse 11 is a little different.

The officers tell the people that within three days, they're to be preparing provisions or as to get ready to move. In chapter three, verse two, they're now starting to move, but they're to prepare themselves for the actual crossing. And so that's, I would say it's a different set of days.

But you'll see commentators going on both sides of that issue. Regardless, they get to the instructions are there to come down in verse four to keep a distance of about a thousand yards, 2,000 cubits, a cubit being about 18 inches. And so, they're to maintain quite a distance between themselves and the ark.

And you remember that the ark itself was a symbol of God's presence on earth. God, of course, is everywhere. But if you were to locate God on earth, it would be in the tabernacle, associated with the tabernacle somehow, in the cloud, or within the tabernacle.

Within the Tabernacle itself is the Holy of Holies, the most holy place. Within the most holy place is the ark. And on top of that is the mercy seat, which is essentially God's throne on the earth.

And so, when the ark moves, the Tabernacle moves, that's where God was. And so it's this idea that they were to stay away from the ark was to maintain that element of holiness. So, the word holy or holiness is not used here.

But as I said in the introductory segment, I think holiness is one of the themes in the book. And this is certainly an illustration of that. They are themselves profaned.

They have been in the wilderness. They've not been celebrating Passover and the things that we find out in chapter five. They've not been circumcising.

So, they're to maintain that distance at this point. And yet, in verse five, Joshua instructs them to consecrate yourselves. It's not a word we use a whole lot in modern-day Western countries and English, but it's to consecrate means to make yourself holy, to make something holy.

And so Joshua is saying, purify yourselves, consecrate yourselves, make yourselves holy. And the reason is that the next day, verse five, the Lord will do wonderful things among you. And that's a beautiful word in Hebrew.

It's *niphlaot*. It's the closest word in Hebrew to miracles. ESV translated as wonders among you.

I like the idea of wonderful things, things to marvel at, to wonder at. God's promising to do astonishing things the next day. And that's why to make themselves worthy of participating in this or observing this, they need to sanctify themselves.

We might also mention there in this section of the chapter, there's an emphasis on Israel gaining confidence and having certainty that God is doing things that they might know. The word know, K-N-O-W, occurs three times in strategic places here.

First time in verse four, don't come near to the ark in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before.

I think there's a wordplay there. Maybe partly, just literally, you haven't been on this path. You need to follow the ark so you can know where to go to get down to the Jordan where you're supposed to cross.

But more symbolically, more metaphorically, I think following the ark and by extension, the commandments on the tablets in the ark and God's instructions and so on, will give you a roadmap for how to live and how to be able to settle in the land. So, maintain that proper reverence for God here. The second reference to know is in verse seven, when God says to Joshua, today I'll begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, I will be with you.

So, there's this kind of putting it down a benchmark saying this is a sign that the people can be sure that Joshua is a successor because God is going to do certain things. And then verse 10, Joshua says, here's how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you all these lands. In verse 11, what it is that they're to know, what's the sign of that is the Lord, the ark of the covenant is passing before you into the Jordan.

So, there's just a small thing there. But the idea of confidence is found in the vocabulary of knowing. So back to verse five, God is going to do wonderful things.

And so, Joshua instructs the people to pick up the ark of the covenant. Notice this is the ark of the covenant. One of the themes we've mentioned as part of the book is the covenant.

And this is the ark representing the covenant God made with Moses and the people at Mount Sinai. And so, they're to pick up that ark, pass before the people. And so they took up the ark and the covenant and went before the people.

Now, another one of the themes I mentioned early on was the theme of obedience. And here's a very small illustration of that. In verse six, it says the instructions were to take up the ark of the covenant and pass on before the people.

That's the instruction. The report or that's the command, let's say. And the report of the execution of the command is in the next part of verse six.

So, they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people. In Hebrew, that's literally exactly the same words as in the command, except for the change of a word from pass on to went. But in other words, the author of the book is saying, here's what Joshua said.

And then the author tells us, that they did exactly what he said. So just in a small way, that's one illustration of that theme of obedience. So then, in verse eight, they commanded the people, the priests, to get to the brink of the waters of the Jordan.

They would stand still in the Jordan. So, the first section of this chapter that I just mentioned, stage one, is verses one to six. And then stage two is now the instructions, the further instructions for crossing the Jordan, verses seven to 13.

And so, the first thing God says is, I'm going to begin to exalt you in the sight of the people so that they may know that essentially you're the successor to Moses and I'm with you just like I was with him. Again, part of the promise and fulfillment of promises is found here, because in this verse, we see what I just read. And look at chapter four, verse 14.

I'm sorry, yeah, verse 14 says, on that day, this is after they've crossed, on that day, the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all people. And they stood in awe of him, just as they stood in awe of Moses all the days of his life. So right within the confines of two chapters, we have a promise and then the fulfillment of the promise.

God's promise-keeping and the fulfillment of that. That's another small illustration at the chapter level. So, the instructions are to get down next to the Jordan, verse eight.

And Joshua brings people together, tells them that this is how they're going to know that the living God is among you. Verse 10, and that without fail, he will drive out from before you all these people. Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites.

So, there are seven groups here. And that may be a symbolic number. There may have been more.

In the early segment, I gave you a map. I gave you in the north, there's the Hittite Empire. It was flourishing roughly at this time.

There's also a separate way that the Hittites are referred to in the Bible, and that's here. And that would be a smaller group of people probably living within Canaan, not part of the great Hittite Empire, but smaller groups. Abraham, who lived before the Hittite Empire, also encountered Hittites, probably a local manifestation of people who were called that.

So that's two different types of people we're talking about here. I want to maybe take a little break and go back at this point to a chapter in Deuteronomy. So if we want to turn back to Deuteronomy chapter 7, we'll point something out about these nations.

Excuse me, Deuteronomy chapter 7, Moses now is speaking early before Joshua. And in verse 1, it gives us, verses 1 and 2, at least verse 1, gives us some information about these nations. So, it says, when the Lord your God brings you into the land that you're entering to take possession of it and clears away many nations before you.

And then it mentions the nations Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and the Jebusites. Seven nations, again, same group, same number. But then look what it says at the end of verse 1, Deuteronomy 7, verse 1. It says, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you.

So, Israel is coming in as a very small minority band of people. One side question that has been asked is, how big was the nation of Israel when they came out of Egypt? And what's the population? And back in Exodus chapter 13, it mentions the Israelites coming out of Egypt, 600,000 men of fighting age and so on, plus women and children. So, extrapolating with wives and then children, two to three million people, perhaps.

And that's a pretty big band of people that come out of Egypt and across the Sinai and live in the wilderness for all those years. And then to come into a land in which they are a minority, smaller than the seven. So that's a population of 21 million, 24 million, something like that if this is correct.

In the modern state of Israel, there's nowhere near that many people. The land won't support that. Now, there has been climate change over the millennia.

Maybe it was more fertile back then. But there's a good reason to be skeptical of maybe that understanding of that number. Another way of coming at the number in Exodus is that it's 600,000 and the word for thousand in Hebrew is eleph.

There's a related word that has the same consonants as eleph. That means it's more of a military company or military unit. Some have argued that it maybe is closer to 10, like a small platoon or a company of people.

And if that's the case, if that's what's going on in numbers, the number 600,000, 600 elephs might have been 600 elephs. And it would be 600 companies of 10 fighting men, which would make about 6,000 men of military age plus women and children. So maybe we're talking about a few thousand, not hundreds of thousands or millions of people.

It's hard to know. It seems to me that's more logical given the millions of people that have been living in the land if we take that number as face value here. So anyway, my point back here in Deuteronomy 7 is that the same number of nations are mentioned.

They're greater and mightier than you. And they're great the miracle that God's going to do by taking these mightier nations and still giving Israel the victories. While we're here, let's look at another passage.

Turn a couple of pages later, Deuteronomy to chapter 9. And I want to look at starting in verse 4. God's instructions through Moses are to Israel. He says, verse 4, do not say in your heart after the Lord your God has thrust them out before you. Name of the Canaanites.

Do not say, quote, it is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land. So, Israel should not puff themselves up thinking that, oh, you know, we're God's chosen people. We're the good ones.

And so that's why he's giving us this land. Continuing in verse 4, whereas on the other, what's really the case, it is because of the wickedness of those nations that the Lord is driving them out before you. Verse 5, not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going to possess their land.

But because of the wickedness of those nations, the Lord your God is driving them out before you that he may confirm the word that the Lord has poured to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So, part of the answer to the question of the difficult issue, is God's commanding Israel to destroy all the Canaanites and drive them out. Part of the answer is their own wickedness.

Again, we'll talk in another segment about that and kind of round out that discussion. But this is part of that. So, let's go back to chapter Joshua, chapter 3, and we've just looked at verse 10 with the 10 nations mentioned.

Verse 11 then mentions the Ark of the Covenant. The Lord of all the earth is passing over before you. The word Ark or Ark of the Covenant occurs a whole bunch of times in these 13 verses.

It's kind of as if the real focus in these first part before they actually cross, starting in verse 14, is to say it's God's presence here that's the most important thing. So, verse 13 then gives them the specifics when the souls and feet of the priest carry in the Ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth. When they rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters shall be cut off and flowing, etc.

So that's kind of the looking ahead. Now, on the surface level, we might answer the question, what is chapter 3 really about? And we can answer in a concise form saying, well, Israel crossed the Jordan. That facilitates the beginning of the real action in the book of possessing the land and so on.

But my view is that no, that's a secondary effect of what was going on here. The author of the book is writing this up in a way, these two chapters actually in a way, that is the author's interest and the author's excitement is not so much that they got from point A to point B, they got from east to west. The author's excitement is that God did this amazing miracle that we read about now in verses 14 to 16.

So, let's look at that. All of verses 1 to 13 have been building up to the actual event itself. And so, the event itself is told in verses 14 through 16.

And even there, it's kind of a slow buildup. In verses 12 and 13, it's kind of saying, here's the commands, here's what's going to happen. Verse 14 is the author now telling us, okay, here's how they began to work.

So, verse 14, says, so when the people set out from the tents to pass over the Jordan, and I'm going to kind of try to read it in a way that the Hebrew, the clauses kind of go. And just anticipate, all of verses 14 and 15, syntactically in Hebrew, are moving toward the main event, which is in verse 16. I mentioned earlier about the sequence of vowel consecutives, and there are no vowel consecutives in verses 14 and 15.

The first one is in verse 14, and it's resolved in verse 16. So, all of verses 14 and 15 are kind of parenthetical aside, leading up to the big event in chapter 16. So let me try to read it in a way that captures that.

So, or, and it happened, King James would say, and it came to pass. The first subpoint is when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan, the second subpoint, is with the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant before the people, the third subpoint, verse 15, and when they had got when those bearing the Ark had got as far as the Jordan, fourth subpoint, and when the feet of the priests bearing the Ark were dipped in the brink of the water, and now there's a, even further parenthetical aside, most of your Bibles have a parenthesis in that last part of verse 15, it says, oh, by the way, the Jordan overflows all of its banks during the time of the harvest. And it seems to me that the purpose of that, and that's in a subordinate clause, syntactically in Hebrew, the point of that is to say, well, Israel, you know, they're crossing the Jordan at a time when they normally would not be able to cross.

It was not as if there was the dry season, they could find a place to tiptoe across or to wade across with the water up to their ankles. This is the time when the river was at its highest point, and that's giving credence to the great miracle that's going to be happening. So, all of that's preparation, and so, and it came to pass verse 14, what was it that came to pass? Verse 16.

Four things. There are four verbs that talk about the waters. And I'll just read it, well, let me try to read it again with emphasis.

The waters coming down from the mud stood up, first verb, and they rose up in one heap, very far, far away, second verb, at a place called Adam, the city which is opposite Zarethan. So that's north, quite a few miles from where they're crossing, and so the point is that the Jordan River waters are stopped from flowing up there. And we're told about that two different ways, they stood up and they rose up two different verbs.

And then it continues, and those flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah, the salt sea, namely the Dead Sea. The next part of the verse says, in my version, says, we're completely cut off, in Hebrew, that's two more verbs, we're cut off and stopped. So, there are four verbs talking about what happened to the waters within the compass of one verse.

And then it says, and then the final sentence or clause of verse 16 says, the people passed over opposite Jericho. And syntactically, that is in what we call a subordinate clause. And it's as if the author is saying, here's this wonderful thing's happening with God doing this to the waters, and, oh, by the way, lest I forget, they crossed the Jordan.

But that's not the point that the author is trying to make. The point the author is trying to make is that God did this big thing with the waters. And remember back in chapter two, Rahab had mentioned the defeat of the Egyptians at the Red Sea.

And now we have a similar kind of event here. So, the author wants us to marvel at that, what God did, the great miracle, and stopping up these waters. And these waters were not in the dry season, it was the time of the greatest.

So, in verse 17, the conclusion of the chapter, the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant stood firmly on dry ground. And there are different words in Hebrew for talking about earth, land, dust, or ground. This is a very special word, it's yalasha, and it's used to talk about dry land versus wet water.

It's the word used in Exodus 14, four different times, talking about when the Red Sea parted and the Israelites were able to walk across on dry ground. It wasn't like they were slogging through the mud. God had blown the land dry.

It's the verb used in Jonah when the fish spits up Jonah onto the dry ground. So, it's always dry ground versus wet. And so, what's happening here, the water stood up and what they're crossing, again, is dry land, not muddy land.

So, the priests carrying the Ark are sitting on dry ground. And this also should immediately remind us or a reader of the miracle at the Red Sea, because it's the same word. It's not that common a word.

It only occurs in a few places. And all of Israel was passing over on dry ground till the nation finished passing over the Jordan. So, the miracle was accomplishing the crossing.

But the author wants us to marvel at this miracle itself. Chapter four is, in a sense, the author putting the pause button on the action in the book because now he wants us to marvel even further at that miracle of the waters. So, at the beginning, God instructs Joshua to have 12 men come and take 12 stones, verses two and three, from the middle of the Jordan and bring them over, lay them down where you can lodge tonight.

So, they call the 12 men. And look what it says in verse six. The purpose of these 12 stones, is they're being built as an altar, not as an altar of sacrifice, but as a memorial altar.

And the way we would today have a memorial plaque like we have the memorial plaques for 9-11 and other kinds of big events. Verse six. The purpose of this is that this may be a sign among you.

When your children ask in time to come, what do these stones mean? Notice the wording. It doesn't say, this is the place where they cross from A to B. It says, verse seven, you should tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the Ark of the Covenant. When it passed over the Jordan, that was again, a subordinate clause, not a main clause.

The waters of Jordan were cut off. So, two different times, two different ways. Again, in chapter three, verse seven, it's affirming the miracle of chapter, I'm sorry, chapter four, verse seven.

It's affirming the miracle of chapter three, verse 16. So they did that. They take the 12 stones.

In verse nine, Joshua himself takes up some stones. And it seems like maybe there are a couple of different sets of stones here. But I think the point is that they have 12 men setting up stones to kind of mark when the water is cut off and they're going across dry land.

They could see this as a marker from far away, they're crossing. And then Joshua himself takes these stones up in verse nine and sets them up on the bank. And I'm sorry, the other way around.

Joshua would have placed the stones himself in the river. Then the men take them out onto the bank. So, I think verse nine is kind of a parenthetical flashback.

It's not talking about two separate sets of stones. So, they did all they commanded. Notice in verse 10, the repetition of the idea of everything.

Everybody was obeying the Lord and Joshua. They were doing everything by the book. And the people passed over in haste and the ark comes out and so on.

So, we'll just jump to the end. There's a kind of reiteration of this idea of the significance of the stones. So, it mentions the dry ground in verse 18.

And people came out of the Jordan on the 10th day of the first month. They encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho now. And they had the 12 stones there that they'd set up.

And then he said to the people, verse 21 when your children asked their fathers in time to come, what do these stones mean? Then you shall let your children know Israel passed over. This is the first time the verb passing over is in an independent clause that's kind of emphasizing that. But notice that it says they passed over on dry ground.

So, it's still the emphasis on that miracle. And then verse 23, again, the Lord dried up the waters of the Jordan for you till you passed over as the Lord, your God did to the Red Sea when he dried out for us before we passed over. So, there for the first time, the connection with the Red Sea is explicit.

It's implicit in earlier some of the vocabulary, but now it's explicit. This wonderful miracle that God had done in the Red Sea also is replicated here on a smaller level with the Jordan River. And then I think it's really interesting how the chapter ends because the chapter ends telling us that this is for two reasons.

And one is an external reason. Another is an internal reason. But there are two reasons why God did this big miracle.

Number one, verse 24a, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty. We've seen Israel knowing in the first part of the chapter, chapter three, having confidence. Now God's desire is for the nations to know that Israel's God is mighty.

So, there's the external testimony to the nations. And then secondly, internally, so that you may fear the Lord your God forever. So that you, the Israelites, may have a proper sense of reverence and awe for the Lord God who had performed these miracles.

I hope you understand that in the Old Testament, the idea of the fear of the Lord is not just the idea of being terrified and being afraid of something, but the idea of

reverence and awe and holding Him in proper honor. And so, this is again kind of in contrast to the wilderness generation who had not feared the Lord and had rebelled so many times. There's a new start here and there's much more emphasis on obedience.

And so the chapter ends with this wrap-up of the purpose of the miracle being of two things, one to testify to the nations and one to be a bolster to Israel's faith. And actually now in my own outlining of the book, I would argue that chapter five, verse one is really the conclusion to chapters three and four. So let me just point out why I think that.

Chapter four, verse 24 says this external testimony to the nations that they would know. The very next thing is said, and I hope you understand and know that the original manuscripts did not have chapter and verse numbers in them so there's no real break here. And so, the very next thing that says, the very next thing that is said is chapter five, verse one, as soon as all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the West and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea heard, remember Rahab had said, we have heard what the Lord your God had done.

So, Israel's reputation seems to be going before it at every turn. As soon as they heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan, there was that miracle again, for the people of Israel, till they had crossed over, their hearts melted, echoing the words of Rahab in chapter two. And there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel.

So, we have at the very beginning of the book, Rahab saying, you know, we're terrified of you all because of what God did in the wilderness and to the Egyptians. Now, when the action of the book is actually unfolding, God does another great miracle and we see the kings themselves melting and there's no spirit in them. So, it kind of reinforces what Rahab has said.

And that's, in a sense, the fulfillment of verse 24, chapter four, verse 24a, that the nations may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty. The fulfillment of that is in chapter five, verse one. So, in my view, that's really the end of that whole section and that's where we'll end this segment.

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