

# JOSHUA—WEEK 3

## REMEMBER



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*Joshua, Week 3 — Remember*

*The Cover Picture is by Jean Fouquet (1420–1477)  
On display in Paris at the Bibliotheque nationale de France.*

The Israeli army crosses the Jordan quickly, but that's not what's important. What matters is the impact it has on the minds of the Israelis, their children, and their enemies. The Israelis will now look up to, and follow, Joshua. Their descendants will have a new Passover lesson about a second crossing—with stones as evidence.

Their enemies will have a total loss of courage and resolve.

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1 Joshua 3:14–17

*So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest), that the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan. So the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho. Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.*

Adam is about 20 miles upstream from where they crossed. Mudslides there have been known to temporarily block the flow of the Jordan river. Some commentators think that explains what this passage is describing.

But an upstream mudslide can only explain part of it. The Jordan went from wet to dry much too quickly to be explained by a mere blockage. The Hebrew word in verse 15 that's translated as "dipped" (נִטְבָּלוּ *nit-baloo*) definitely refers to dipping or immersing. So, the Jordan was a full-fledged river ("overflowing its banks") when the priests got to the edge. Yet, the word in verse 17 that's translated as "dry ground" (קַרְבָּה *kha-ra-bah*) is related to the word for drought. It definitely means dry ground, not just solid ground.

So, this was a miracle, not merely some great coincidence.

That's important. This miracle is designed to strengthen the faith of the people. A mere coincidence would be nice, not to mention convenient, but that's not enough to steel them for the battles ahead.

And some of the greatest battles won't be with the enemy on the other side of the Jordan.

They'll be with the enemy within.

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The Israelis will prove very adept at defeating themselves. The armies on the other side of the Jordan aren't the problem. Time after time, we will see people break faith and do something so stupid that the anger of the LORD will burn against them. The result will be tragic.

And this pattern will recur throughout the rest of the Old Testament. God's people just can't seem to be satisfied with doing things right.

So it is with us. Right now, there are many Christian groups praying for revival. But who do they think needs reviving? Everyone else, of course.

No, revival starts right here—in us. We're the ones who need reviving.

Pray for that.

2 Joshua 4:1–8

*And it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over the Jordan, that the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying: “Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from every tribe, and command them, saying, ‘Take for yourselves twelve stones from here, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet stood firm. You shall carry them over with you and leave them in the lodging place where you lodge tonight.’ ”*

*Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the children of Israel, one man from every tribe; and Joshua said to them: “Cross over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever.”*

*And the children of Israel did so, just as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan, as the LORD had spoken to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there.*

Of the seven wonders of the ancient world, only the great pyramids remain. Why? Because they’re made of great stones. The wailing wall in Jerusalem (which is the western wall of the temple mount) also remains—for the same reason. Stones are permanent, and big stones are less likely to get moved.

We know the stones the twelve men picked up are reasonably large because Joshua instructed each man to carry it *on his shoulder*. However, they’re not more than one man can carry. So, each stone is around 30–90 pounds. They can be moved, but they’re reasonably permanent memorials.

And being river rocks, they’ve been polished smooth by the current. It’ll be obvious to anyone who sees them that they came from the bottom of the Jordan. Plus, they’re too big to have just popped out on their own during a flood. They’re also too heavy to fetch out of a river while it’s flowing. That might not be too hard if you happen to have a backhoe handy, but it’s a tough, even dangerous, job otherwise.

So, future generations will wonder how those big river rocks got up on the shore.

And they’ll ask.

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Events fade in the rear-view mirror. Eyewitnesses die off. It won’t be long until all of the eyewitnesses of the Jordan crossing are gone.

But the rocks will remain. That’ll preserve the faith through countless generations, right?

Nope.

3 Joshua 4:9–14 (ESV)

*And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day. For the priests bearing the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua.*

*The people passed over in haste. And when all the people had finished passing over, the ark of the LORD and the priests passed over before the people. The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh passed over armed before the people of Israel, as Moses had told them. About 40,000 ready for war passed over before the LORD for battle, to the plains of Jericho. On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they stood in awe of him just as they had stood in awe of Moses, all the days of his life.*

As He promised to do, *the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel*. While the first purpose of this miracle was to strengthen the faith of the Israeli army, it also served to solidify Joshua's position as their leader. They had totally looked up to Moses. His command was never questioned. That was helpful.

But now, their allegiance to Joshua is less solid. Some of them made an emphatic pledge to follow him in Joshua 1:16–18, and even talked about forcing allegiance in others, but why say that if everyone's on board? What Joshua needs is nationwide allegiance that isn't forced.

And this miracle does the trick—permanently. All of Israel *stood in awe of him just as they had stood in awe of Moses, all the days of his life*.

What's especially good about this is that Joshua's plan for crossing the Jordan seemed a bit nutty from a secular point of view. Presumably, there were plenty of people who were unsure how this would play out. Even if they kept silent about it, they had plenty of doubts.

Now they don't.

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That's good, because more seemingly nutty plans are coming. Having pulled this one off though, all is set. They'll follow Joshua's seemingly nutty plans because they've already seen one of them work.

The same principle applies to Christianity. Loving your enemy is pretty nutty too. To do that you have to do more than just believe; you have to *believe in your heart* (Romans 10:9a).

Faith comes in all shapes and sizes. You can have faith and still not have the kind of faith that enabled Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand to love their enemies in a way that seems impossible—and insane.

Faith like that comes through practice. You can't be talked into it, nor talk yourself into it. You have to live it, see it, cross your Jordans with it. God has to reveal himself to you.

Only then can you really know, in your heart, in your bones, that it's all true.

4 Joshua 4:15–24 (ESV)

*And the LORD said to Joshua, “Command the priests bearing the ark of the testimony to come up out of the Jordan.” So Joshua commanded the priests, “Come up out of the Jordan.” And when the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD came up from the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests’ feet were lifted up on dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks, as before.*

*The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. And he said to the people of Israel, “When your children ask their fathers in times to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.’ For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever.”*

The fathers will have quite a story to tell their children. *The tenth day of the first month* just happens to be Passover. In their culture, that’s history day.

This timing is not a coincidence. The analogy between this crossing and the crossing of the Red Sea is unmissable: the supernatural parting of the waters, the crossing on dry ground.

History day has a new chapter.

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The lesson of the stones was mentioned just a few verses ago. Now, the lesson is repeated, with the twist of coupling it with the Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea. Obviously, this is a very big deal.

As it should be. Nothing is more heartbreaking than failing to pass on our faith to our descendants. We can pray our brains out, plus teach them a seemingly airtight case for belief, and still fail. There simply isn’t any guaranteed method.

The stones and the history behind them, which leads into the lesson on the harrowing escape from Egypt, is about as solid a case as one could make.

But the larger lesson is that this solid case doesn’t work. Even the presence onshore of large river rocks from the bottom of a great river isn’t enough to convince future generations. They’ll abandon faith in the LORD over and over.

Thus does the lesson of God’s faithfulness set up the lesson of man’s unfaithfulness. That’s the central lesson of the whole Old Testament.

It’s how the whole Old Testament points to Christ.

5 Joshua 5:1

*So it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who were on the west side of the Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel.*

Imagine for a moment that you're a king on the west side of the Jordan. You're just as informed as Rahab was. She said, "*For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.*" — Joshua 2:10

But, unlike Rahab, you don't reach the conclusion she reached — "*And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.*" — Joshua 2:11

You don't believe the "rumors." The Jordan River is a natural barrier right now that prevents the Israeli army from invading. (*for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest*) — Joshua 3:15b

Any attempt to cross would be dreadfully slow and the few troops that came across first would be sitting ducks for your troops. So, for now, you're safe. You're keeping an eye on things. If they try anything now, they're sure to regret it.

Then the unimaginable happens. A spectacular miracle gets the whole Israeli army across in a single day. Your scouts come back terrified and report all this to you. So, *when all the kings heard ... that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan ... their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer.*

Their culture views wars as battles between gods. They know that their gods are no match for anyone who can pull that trick off—the LORD who, "*is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.*"

Just as this miracle gives the Israelites confidence that they'll win, so it gives the Canaanites confidence that they'll lose.

This enables everything to come.

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There is an "economy of miracles" going on here. This one miracle accomplishes a great many things. While it isn't the last miracle—the walls of Jericho will be tumblin' down soon—many battles will be more easily won because of the melted hearts of the Canaanites and their kings.

God foreordains means as well as ends. Miracles are not God fixing a mistake He made earlier.

They are part of His eternal plan.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Where do you see a need for revival inside the church?
2. What's the most permanent thing you've made or done?
3. What experience strengthened your faith?
4. What's your favorite lesson from Christian history?
5. Have you ever seen events cascade in a choreographed way?

*Items for prayer:*