



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for January 18, 2009
Released on Wednesday, January 14, 2009**

“Commitment in Leadership”

Lesson Text: Joshua 3:1-13

Background Scripture: Joshua 3

Devotional Reading: Psalm 142

Joshua 3:1-13

1 And Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over.

2 And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host;

3 And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it.

4 Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore.

5 And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.

6 And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people.

7 And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.

8 And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan.

9 And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the LORD your God.

10 And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites.

11 Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan.

12 Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man.

13 And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon a heap.

LESSON AIMS:

Facts: to see what God did for the Israelites when they obeyed His commands through Joshua and were able to cross into Canaan.

Principle: to be aware that God is with His people in the difficult times of life.

Application: to urge believers to listen to God when they are faced with life's problems and seek to do His will.

INTRODUCTION:

He had been one of those outstanding elders in a local church. He was a businessman, but his real interest in life was God's Word. He loved nothing more than to talk about the Bible at length with preachers and Bible college professors whom he met. With his concordance he had done word studies and researched many topics.

Now, however, he was concerned. His health was declining, and within a short period of time others would have to take his leadership role in the church. He may not have been the chairman, but for years he had been the leader whose wisdom was sought in every situation.

His concerns were expressed in an article that he wrote, "Passing the Mantle." Its title comes from the occasion when Elijah was taken to Heaven in a whirlwind and dropped his mantle (or cloak) to Elisha, who was going to succeed him as the leader of the prophets (2 Kings 2:11-13).

Leadership transitions have two dimensions: the concerns of the one who has been the leader and the concerns of the successor. The former leader may wonder if the successor will bring to ruin what years of work have accomplished; in some cases the one receiving the mantle of leadership does little more than bask in the benefits that are available. The forward momentum slows, and over a period of time there is a reversal of the positive motion that had been in effect. The one giving up leadership also may wonder if the one who follows will do so well that many will question why the previous leader was not able to accomplish as much.

The successor also confronts certain issues. "Can I do as well? Will I fail?" are questions of self-doubt. The new leader may want to change the image or methodology of the organization while wondering how the changes will be received. Some people cannot handle change; others delight in it.

This lesson presents the first leadership challenge that Joshua faced after he succeeded Moses. Moses had been the father of the nation, and he had accomplished much in the 40 years that he was the leader. At times the Israelites rebelled against God and Moses, but Moses always met the challenges.

Would Joshua himself be equal to the obstacles that the nation was to face in Canaan? Assurances had been given (see Joshua 1), but was Joshua up to the job?

LESSON BACKGROUND:

The background for this lesson is essentially the same as in the previous lesson about Rahab. Featured here will be a review of references to Joshua during the previous part of his life—the 40 years in the wilderness that were years of preparation for his task as Moses' successor.

The first mention of Joshua occurs just after the initial time that Moses struck a rock for water to flow from that rock (Exodus 17). The Amalekites, a wandering desert group descended from Esau, immediately attacked, perhaps desiring possession of the new water supply. Moses selected Joshua to organize an army out of the inexperienced Israelites to confront the enemy.

Moses needed someone like Joshua, so the next reference to him is as Moses' "minister" or valet (Exodus 24:13). At that time Moses ascended Mt. Sinai to receive the two tablets with the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20) and the Law in oral form. Joshua was permitted to go beyond the point where Moses instructed the elders to wait for "us" until they returned (Exodus 24:14).

Young Joshua is also mentioned as remaining in what Moses called "the Tabernacle of the congregation," perhaps to care for it as a part of his ministry to Moses (Exodus 33:7-11). In Numbers 13 and 14, Joshua was one of the 12 spies who entered Canaan from the south. That 40-day period turned into 40 years when the Israelites developed the "grasshopper complex" (Numbers 13:33). As the people heard the negative reports of 10 spies, they sided with the majority.

Only Joshua and Caleb of the twelve had the faith needed to forge ahead into Canaan, and they encouraged the people to do so. The people attempted to stone the two "good" spies, but God prevented it (14:10). The penalty was not only forty years in the wilderness (14:34), but God decreed that 603,548 out of the 603,550 men of war (Numbers 1:45-46) would die in the wilderness during the time remaining (see Deuteronomy 2:14). This averaged more than forty funerals per day, each a reminder of the rebellion against God.

Joshua was designated by the Lord to be Moses' successor. Joshua was "a man in whom is the spirit" (Numbers 27:18), and he was commissioned, or ordained by Eleazar (the son of Aaron who became the high priest after Aaron died; 27:19-23). Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had also "laid his hands upon him" (Deuteronomy 34:9).

In one of Moses' last addresses to the nation, he commended Joshua to the people. He also challenged Joshua to be strong and courageous (Deuteronomy 31:7). At that time the Lord himself commissioned Joshua with the same admonition (31:14, 23) and did so again in Joshua 1:7. Joshua was God-chosen to lead the people across the Jordan, into the Promised Land.

JOSHUA LEADING AND PREPARING THE PEOPLE (Joshua 3:1-6)

The events of the first two chapters of the book of Joshua lead up to the dramatic event about to take place. The people assure Joshua that they will follow him as they had followed Moses. Joshua reminds the two and one-half eastern tribes of their commitment to help in the conquest on the western side of the Jordan River (Joshua 1:10-15). The incident of the spies and Rahab (last week's lesson) provides the important information that the inhabitants of the land are fearful. All is in readiness.

1. What is the setting as Joshua prepares to lead Israel into the Promised Land? (Joshua 3:1)

The Israelite encampment covered many square miles east of the Jordan. They had been camped at Shittim while Joshua awaited the report of the spies he had sent ahead into the city of Jericho. The spies' report had been favorable: "And they said unto Joshua, Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us" (Josh. 2:24). Joshua knew they should not wait any longer, so the next morning he gave the order for the Israelites to move up to the bank of the Jordan River. There they set up camp once again and waited for three days.

The Jordan River was in flood stage at the end of the rainy season and because of the melting snow on the mountains to the far north (Joshua 3:15; 4:18). It is clear that the people must cross this obstacle to enter Canaan. We can surmise that some of the older people who had been teenagers when the Red Sea was crossed 40 years before wonder if God will now repeat that miraculous experience.

2. What preparation and instructions were given for crossing Jordan? What evidences do we see that the crossing was more than a military or physical journey? (vs. 2-4)

We are not told how this period of time was used, but we are told that after the three-day wait, Joshua sent his officers through the camp with orders. No doubt there were many necessary preparations, because it was not just the military men preparing to cross the Jordan but their wives and children as well. The move up to the bank of the river would have signaled the beginning of the next phase, and everyone would have begun their preparations automatically. Imagine the excitement as they realized what was coming next!

The officers instructed the people to begin walking toward the river when they saw the Ark of the Covenant being carried by the priests. At this time the Ark of the Covenant replaced the cloud or pillar of fire as the focal point of leading for the people. Just as the cloud and pillar of fire had once represented God's presence, so now did the Ark of the Covenant. "The presence of the ark indicates that the crossing of the Jordan was much more than a military maneuver: It was a religious procession" (Gaebelein, gen. ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan). It was not just Israel going into Canaan; it was God claiming His land.

The ark was going to be carried by Levites who were priests (Numbers 1:47-54). As soon as the people saw the priests begin to walk with the ark, they were to begin moving toward the river. The excitement and suspense must have been at an all-time high.

A distance of two thousand cubits, or three thousand feet, was to be maintained between the ark and the people. This is well over half a mile. It is not clear whether this means they were to stay that far behind it in order for everyone to see clearly where they were going or whether it means this distance was to be maintained both behind and beside it. Since the text says the

purpose of this distance was for them to know where to go, it seems probable that this is a reference to following no closer than the designated distance.

This journey was one that none of the people except the two spies had ever taken before. They needed clear guidance from the Lord, just as we do when He leads us into new ventures of life.

3. What are some times in your life when you've seen God move but you've failed to follow? Why do we fail to act when we should? How do you overcome this problem?

Not a day goes by that God does not put into our lives opportunities to follow His lead. We often ask for God to lead, then fail to follow. Sometimes God's leading is to put us in a position to share our faith with a friend or coworker. But because of fear of saying the wrong thing or just feeling the time is not right, we fail to act.

We may see a neighbor working on a project around the house and sense a compulsion to offer assistance. This compulsion could be God giving us an opportunity to share His love by serving. Instead, we rationalize that we would be intruding, and thus we fail to respond. Our desire to spend what we earn on ourselves keeps us from following the leading of God to help a needy person or a Christian ministry that is having financial difficulties. Any corrective action begins with repentance.

4. What special preparation (sanctifying process) did Joshua call for? (vs. 5-6)

Further evidence that this was more than a military or physical activity can be seen in the instruction for people to sanctify themselves. Everything about this event centered on the God of Israel, who was making their entrance into Canaan possible. Since God is holy, since He was the ultimate leader of this advance, and since they were following the visible symbol of His presence, the people needed to be holy also. This was not a secular event; it was a sacred movement into the Promised Land.

Joshua called on the Israelites to sanctify themselves because God was about to perform miraculous things for them. Sanctification basically means to set oneself apart for righteousness and from sin (consecration). Israel saw it as a purification from both inner sin and outer defilement. Therefore, sanctifying themselves involved both external and internal preparation.

External preparation was commanded for Israel at Mount Sinai when God told Moses He was going to appear before them on the mountain (Exod. 19:10-15). It involved washing their clothes (and probably themselves) and abstaining from sexual activity with their spouses. These were symbolic ceremonial purification rites, probably also employed at this time, that emphasized their appearance before a holy God. Crossing the Jordan was in the direct presence of that God.

The sanctifying process occurred that day, and the next morning Joshua told the priests to take up the ark and begin to cross the river. The miracle was about to begin, and they were the ones to reveal to the people that it was happening. The priests responded immediately. Anticipation must have been high; God was obviously at work among them, and they were about to go through something that had happened only one time before, at the Red Sea.

PEOPLE FOLLOWING (Joshua 3:7-13)

5. What promise did God give Joshua regarding the day of crossing the Jordan? (v. 7)

The Lord gave Joshua a wonderful promise that day: He would magnify him in the sight of all Israel. The people would be assured that Joshua was the right leader, and that the Lord was with him as He had been with Moses. He would be exalted in the eyes of the people in the same way Moses had been exalted. Respect for Joshua had already been established, but after this event it would increase significantly. For it to be comparable to that afforded Moses was great indeed. "This was, of course, a continuity with what they had experienced when they came out of Egypt. . . Now they were going to see a sign which paralleled the parting of the Red Sea. Though God gave the same sign as He had with Moses in order to establish Joshua's authority with the people, there was obviously something much more important at work than either Moses or Joshua. There is a continuity of the power of the Lord" (Schaeffer, *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History*, Crossway). God stated that the people would recognize that His presence was

with Joshua just as it had been with Moses throughout his lifetime. Joshua 4:14 confirms that the people responded as God intended.

6. What additional instruction did God give for the priests carrying the ark? (vs. 8,9)

One more detail was now added to Joshua's instructions for those carrying the ark. They were to walk toward the Jordan River and then stand still in the river. Joshua 3:15-16 relates that the priests actually had to step into the water before it began to dry up. Each step was literally one of faith, for God did not perform the miracle until the soles of their feet rested in the water of the river. Then "the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan" (v. 17).

Keep in mind that the river was at flood stage and reason would have said that it was dangerous to enter the water. The priests stepping into the water had to be an act of faith. Unlike with the Red Sea, the waters were not parted in advance of the priests entering the water. It was only after they stepped into it in faith that the waters began to dry up.

7. What are some areas in which you (or your church) need to get your feet wet? What's holding you back?

Getting one's feet wet is another way of expressing a need to step out of a comfort zone. Churches and Christians are often fearful of taking steps of faith. We see much fear and faithlessness on the part of the Israelites during the exodus, and human nature hasn't changed.

Reaching out to new people, our very mission as a church, often goes lacking. Fear of bringing "those people" into our fellowship inhibits our stepping out. Ministering to Christians who are hurting and caught up in a web of sin can be uncomfortable and time-consuming. But such acts of mercy are necessary if we are to be the people God wants us to be.

8. What is significant about Joshua calling God "the living God" (v. 10)?

Joshua referred to God as "the living God" who was among them. One of the purposes of the passage through the Jordan was for the Israelites to be convinced that the living God was with them. The powerful nations they would face all worshiped false gods; so they did not need to fear them. Not only was their God living, but He was also the sovereign God who ruled the entire world.

9. What specific challenges faced Israel after they entered the Promised Land?

While the prospect of finally entering the land God had promised them was exciting, the people knew that ahead of them lay great challenges. Seven powerful nations were already living in Canaan: Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites. Joshua sensed that it was time for a word of encouragement. So he called them together by saying, "Come hither, and hear the words of the Lord your God." Here was another reminder that God, not Joshua, was leading them.

God was about to reveal to them once again that He was present with them. He would do this by driving those nations out before them as they advanced into the land. In Exodus 23:20-33, we read details that God gave Moses of how He was going to accomplish this. An angel would go before them to prepare the way and help them. Their responsibility was to not bow down to the gods of any of the nations they were replacing. They were to completely destroy them instead, overthrowing and breaking down all their altars.

10. What was the key to their success as they faced the enemies in Canaan? (v. 11)

As they stayed true to God, He would use divine means to drive out those powerful nations (Exodus 23:28-30). He would cause the people to become fearful and confused and make them run from them. He would send hornets to be such a severe problem that they would leave to get away from them. He would do all this gradually so that the land would not become desolate or overrun by wild animals. Little by little He was going to give them the land. All of it would be theirs, but they were to keep from sinning against Him or serving the false gods of Canaan.

Joshua declared that this was how they would know that the living God was among them. "Verse 11 is the most important part of Joshua's speech. The sign that would confirm the

people's faith was that the Ark of the Covenant would go ahead of them. It would not just go up to the Jordan but would enter it, as if the river were not even there and there were no rushing current to carry everything away" (Goslinga, *Bible Student's Commentary: Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Zondervan). Joshua deliberately referred to God as "the Lord of all the earth" to remind people that He was in control.

11. Why is the choosing of twelve men mentioned here? (v. 12)

Israel was told to appoint one man from each of the twelve tribes for an unnamed task. The choosing of twelve men anticipates what took place in the next chapter of Joshua. Joshua 4:2-8 explains their special duties in the placement of twelve stones as a memorial. Each tribe was represented, reminding the people that God was with and among all of them.

There were two stone memorials for this event. Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan where the priests stood with the Ark of the Covenant (Joshua 4:9). The men selected from each of the twelve tribes of Israel chose the stones to build the memorial at the next campsite, which was named Gilgal (Joshua 4:20). These would serve as everlasting memorials to commemorate the crossing of the Jordan.

12. What did Joshua say God would do in helping them cross the Jordan? (v. 13)

In verse 13, Joshua explained to the people, for the first time, exactly how they were going to get across the Jordan River. He told them that as soon as the priests' feet touched the water, the "Lord of all the earth" would "rest in the waters of Jordan." God himself, as symbolized by the Ark of the Covenant, would "rest" in the waters. The waters flowing down from the north would stop flowing and stand up like a heap at a distance of about twenty miles (v. 16).

This would be different from the parting of the Red Sea, where water heaped up on two sides (Exodus 14:21-22). Water in the Jordan kept flowing toward the Dead Sea – only the waters flowing southward stopped and formed a great heap. We are reminded that "with men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

We cannot help admiring Joshua's commitment to leadership. Good leaders must be visionary and willing to take risks. It helped much that Joshua had been Moses' assistant, for he learned a great deal about trusting God there. It becomes another matter, however, when the mantle of responsibility actually becomes one's own. Joshua's faith in God enabled him to lead effectively.

PRACTICAL POINTS:

- 1.** We are always safest when following the Lord, even when the way is difficult (Joshua 3:1-3).
- 2.** Spiritual battles require spiritual preparation (v. 4).
- 3.** Commitment to the Lord enables us to see His hand at work in all situations (v. 5).
- 4.** We are not to seek honor in the Lord's service; He will honor us in due time (vs. 6-8).
- 5.** God is Lord of all the earth; thus, no earthly power can thwart His will (vs. 9-12).
- 6.** We should view obstacles as opportunities for our faith to grow (v. 13).

CONCLUSION:

When invading a country, one would expect that the military would lead the charge with the best weapons, and best prepared soldiers leading the way. One might also expect the leader to make sure all the tools of war were ready for such an adventure.

But Joshua, Israel's leader, understood where his power and ability came from. His focus was on being prepared spiritually, knowing that it was God, not their army, who would give them victory.

Joshua knew God was with him, and he had seen God work mighty miracles. God had made a commitment to Joshua. Joshua believed the promise and acted on it as he began his leadership role. He may not have known how God would do things or how God would provide, but the knowledge that God would provide gave him all the confidence he needed.

Ancient Jews did not choose Moses, Joshua, etc., by democratic process. Those men could choose subordinates (example: Exodus 18:24-26), but God is the one who chose the main leaders. Today, God has allowed nations and churches the privilege of choosing their own leaders.

Secular books and lectures by motivational speakers often develop the theme of how to be a good leader. But some of the finest thoughts on the qualities and qualifications of being a leader are found in the New Testament. One important passage is Acts 6:3 where the requirement is for men "of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom." We do well to follow this same example when wisely choosing our leaders.

Two other important passages, almost parallel to each other, are 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Listed are attributes that overseers (elders or bishops) in the church should have prior to being given the challenging task of being responsible to give an account for those in their care (see Hebrews 13:17).

Whether it is at the national level or within the church or concerning any group having designated leaders, the admonition is still true: choose your leaders wisely. Another admonition is that leaders should ensure that they are worthy of being followed. Joshua did!

PRAYER:

God, above everything else today, I desire to acknowledge Your leadership and to have the spirit of worship or submission in every part of my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER:

Honor your leaders.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON:

Our next lesson is taken from the book of Judges, which describes a difficult time in Israel's history. The judges were not so much concerned with settling court cases as they were in delivering Israel from her many enemies.

In "Preparing for Commitment," the angel announced the birth of Samson to Manoah and his wife. As an adult, God used Samson to deliver Israel, and his amazing strength was involved. Study Judges 13:1-25.

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