

03

SESSION THREE

The Parting of the Jordan

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we see how God established Joshua as the new leader of His people. Many of the words and actions in Joshua 3 are reminiscent of God's previous words and actions in Israel's history. God was leading His people in a military drill to remind them of His faithfulness, His abilities, and His wisdom. As we see how Israel was reminded to obey and revere God, trusting in His steadfast leadership, so we are inspired to trust in the God who goes before us. Because God is present and powerful, we can trust in Him to guide us into a future that is unknown to us but known to Him.

SCRIPTURE

Joshua 3:5-17; 4:19-24

THE POINT

Genuine faith involves trusting in God and His future promises.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Military soldiers practice drills from boot camp until the end of their military careers. Though learning to march in a group and follow orders is mastered early, military leaders do not abandon the practice and assume soldiers will remember the basics. A drill is practiced because it teaches more than muscle memory and obedience—it teaches generations to come discipline and respect by passing along the legacy.

The Israelites had a legacy to pass along. God led their ancestors out of Egypt and proved His ability to fight for His people and deliver them from foreign territory. He demonstrated His ability to control the hearts of pharaohs and the forces of nature. He even proved His ability to go before the Israelites and make their paths straight.

In Egypt, God instructed the Israelites to prepare a Passover meal and to teach their children the meaning of the Passover throughout their generations (Ex. 12:24-27). His instructions are akin to a military exercise because they teach future generations—through repetition and rehearsal—the value of obedience, discipline, and fear of the Lord their God.

- What are some spiritual practices that have been passed on to you from older family members or people within your church?**

Option 2

- What are some things people put their trust in? (For example: car, parent, sports, cell phone, relationship, technology) Is there anyone or anything completely trustworthy on earth?**

The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror™ is a classic Disney thrill ride. Participants step into an elevator with full expectation that it will drop. And drop it does—a whopping 13 stories! Thousands ride the Tower of Terror each year and trust that they will make it out alive. Does this sound like something you would do?

The Israelites had been through a lot since their exodus from Egypt. Now, the person they had looked to for leadership was gone, and they were being asked to trust “the new guy” who was telling them to walk through a river that was so high it was overflowing its banks! Are you kidding me?!

When was the last time you felt uncertain when it came to trusting God with something that was happening in your life? Maybe you were given three huge assignments at once. Or maybe you found out a close family member was diagnosed with cancer.

- Do you question God's trustworthiness when life or the future seems out of your control? Why or why not?**

Today, we will see how Israel’s trust in Joshua as their new leader was put to the test. Their response would require faith—faith in God and faith in Joshua as their leader.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Genuine faith involves trusting in God and His future promises.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Joshua:** one of the 12 Israelite spies appointed by Moses to scout the land of Canaan; chosen by God as Moses' successor to lead the Israelites to the promised land

PLOT

For quite some time we have seen God speak to Moses, giving instructions as Moses led the Israelites on their way from Egypt toward the promised land. Moses had spoken to God face to face (Ex. 33:11) and was an integral part of God's plan for His people.

But in the first chapter of the Book of Joshua, God makes an announcement that serves as a tsunami and sends cataclysmic waves across the face of the nation. It has a catastrophic effect—"Moses my servant is dead." This announcement raises a question for Israel: "What are we to do now without Moses?" For the first time in 40 years the leadership position in Israel is vacant. Moses the liberator, the lawgiver, the intercessor, is dead. And now, it is Joshua who will lead the people into the promised land.

TIMELINE

THE PARTING OF THE JORDAN

God calls Joshua to lead His people.

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

Rahab helps the Israelites in their conquest of Jericho.

CONQUEST OF AI

How one man's sin can negatively affect everyone around him.

GOD IS WITH HIS PEOPLE

Joshua knew his people were prone to wander away from the Lord. And after deciding not to go into Canaan as God instructed because ten spies had returned with a negative report (Numbers 13:32), they paid the consequences. God did not allow the people who had seen His glory and signs in the exodus to enter the promised land (Numbers 14:22-23). Instead, they were left to wander for 40 years in the wilderness.

Finally, a generation later, God was ready to allow their descendants to cross into the land, so He gave instructions to Joshua:

Then Joshua said to the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.” And Joshua said to the priests, “Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on before the people.” So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people. The LORD said to Joshua, “Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. And as for you, command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, ‘When you come to the brink of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.’” And Joshua said to the people of Israel, “Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God.” And Joshua said, “Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man. And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap.” (Josh. 3:5-13)

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

The language of dispossessing is important here in that “driving out or dispossessing is different from wiping out or destroying. Expulsion is in view, not annihilation. Just as Adam and Eve were ‘driven out’ of the garden (Gen. 3:24) or Cain into the wilderness (4:14) or David from Israel by Saul (1 Sam. 26:19), so the Israelites were to ‘dispossess’ the Canaanites.”¹

God went before Joshua and prepared the way. Joshua would not have to vindicate himself or make himself respected among the Hebrew nation—God would exalt Joshua in the sight of all Israel so they would have the same confidence in his leadership that they had in the long-tenured leadership of Moses. Joshua's responsibility was to remain humble and trust that God would exalt him.

This is the dynamic of God's kingdom. Jesus later said that those who humble themselves will be exalted, those willing to be last will be first, those who lose their life will find it, those willing to serve will be great, and those willing to die will live.

- **When have you been reluctant to trust a new coach or new teacher?** (*p. 22, PSG*)
- **Do you think you would be more apt to trust that person if you knew God had a purpose for placing him or her in that position? Explain.** (*p. 22, PSG*)

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE TO TRUST IN HIS PROMISES

God demonstrated His approval and support of Joshua as His chosen leader of Israel publicly so the Israelites could see that just as God had sanctioned Moses, He was now sanctioning Joshua. The people were to respond by respecting him as they had done with Moses. Their response would require faith—faith in God and faith in Joshua as their leader.

Now, we arrive at the moment where the people's faith would be tested. Would they believe God as they crossed the Jordan River?

So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan. (Josh. 3:14-17)

Imagine the scene. You are one of the travelers walking toward the Jordan River. Sure, you have heard the stories about the Israelites of old passing through the Red Sea on dry ground, but they are not here. This is a new generation.

God Is Omnipotent

God is all-powerful; there is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

Perhaps you think this new generation doesn't have enough faith. Perhaps you're afraid this generation hasn't worshipped enough. Perhaps you reflect on the laws and statutes they haven't kept perfectly, and you wonder if God will do for this generation what He did at the Red Sea. You continue walking—steadily stepping, steadily worrying, steadily having a conversation with yourself about faith—or your lack thereof.

The priests make it to the edge of the Jordan. As they step in, you see the waters to the north rise up in a mass a good distance away. The waters to the south, going toward the Salt Sea, have been cut off. You blink. The Jordan River is at flood stage (Joshua 3:15), yet the land before you is dry. A virtual interstate has opened for this generation.

JOSHUA BUILDS A MEMORIAL TO GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

As the Israelites arrive safely on the other side of the Jordan, they don't want to forget this moment. The story goes on to demonstrate the value of memorials and examples in Joshua 4:19-24:

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.”
(Josh. 4:19-24)

TIMELINE

HEADER**THE CHARGE****TO ISRAEL**

The people must make a choice: worship God alone or follow after false idols.

THE JUDGES**CYCLE**

Because Israel follows after false idols, God delivers them over to their enemies.

DEBORAH

God gives personal gifts to be used for His glory and the good of others.

Joshua commanded twelve men representing the twelve tribes of Israel to bring stones from the middle of the Jordan and to set them up at Gilgal. Those twelve stones would form a memorial for generations to come. Joshua anticipated the children of future generations asking their parents, “What do these stones mean?” In essence, he was creating an opportunity for the Israelites to tell their children that the stones were a memorial and reminder that God had made a way for Israel to pass through the Jordan River on dry ground. The stones would remind Israel of what God could do, since they came from the place where the priests stood while Israel crossed the Jordan.

The stones had a story to tell. This is an indication of the obligation that parents have to share with their children the story of God in the history of the Jewish people as expressed in Deuteronomy 6:7: “You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”

CHRIST CONNECTION

God told Joshua and the Israelites to set up memorial stones to remember what God had done to bring them into the promised land. On the night He was betrayed, Jesus told His disciples to remember the sacrifice He was going to make to save us from our sins. When Christians eat the Lord’s Supper, we remember God’s plan to destroy sin through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

God calls us to remember and to testify about His power. When Moses questioned God about his leading the people, God turned Moses’ rod into a snake. God said that miracles would happen so “that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you” (Exodus 4:5). God calls us to tell the story to one another and to unbelievers so they might believe.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Why was it important for God to assure Joshua of His presence and power? In what ways does God “go before us” in the struggles of our life?** *By demonstrating His power and presence, God was affirming Joshua in the mission ahead, letting him know that he was not entering this battle alone. Likewise, we can be encouraged that God is with us through the battles we face, knowing that He is ultimately in control and is working all things for His glory and our good.*
- **As a young leader following in Moses' shoes, what fears do you think Joshua might have had? How would you have felt?** *Joshua might have felt inadequate or ill-equipped to follow in Moses' shoes, perhaps wondering if he was a worthy candidate.*
- **How can you encourage others in your student ministry when it comes to stepping out in faith and obedience to God?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Like Joshua, what are some “stones” in your own life that serve as reminders to God’s faithfulness?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY
God's Story of
Redemption,
through His Son,
Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY
Where your story
meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES

HEAD

Joshua informed the people that God would perform mighty acts on the next day (Josh. 3:5). The mighty acts were not described; however, they were anticipated. It was the people's responsibility to prepare themselves for what God had planned. This often takes place through the act of consecration, which is not just getting rid of outward distraction, but includes wholeness of the heart, an inner preparation for God to move in us and through us. The people needed to be ready for the miracles God would perform on their behalf.

- **Why is it important to be spiritually prepared for God to work in mighty ways?** *It is important because genuine faith is active, not passive, and should produce within us reasonable expectations to see God work and move both for His glory and our good and joy.*
- **What are some examples of things we can do to prepare our hearts?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HEART

Our story in this session is a vivid picture of the necessity of following God and doing things God's way in order to inherit His blessings. We witnessed a younger generation who, unlike their parents, didn't witness all of the miracles related to the exodus. Yet, they believed and trusted in God, and that faith commitment was revealed in their willingness to take God at His Word.

- **Do you think the people's faith was strengthened at the sight of the Jordan parting?**
Why or why not? *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some things you have witnessed that have increased your own faith in God?**
Answers to this question will vary.

HANDS

All these miracles took place in order to give testimony to people everywhere that God is almighty and is to be feared and worshiped forever. Just as the stones had a story to tell, you and I have a story to tell.

- **When was the last time you were able to give a testimony to God's powerful work in your life?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What kinds of thoughts, feelings, and fears inhibit you from sharing your testimony? What are some ways we can help one another overcome any hesitation to testify to God's power?** *One way to overcome fears is by simply recalling specific acts of faithfulness from God in your own life. By focusing on what God has done for you personally, not only do you alleviate any fears regarding your ability to share the gospel, but you also make much of God by sharing with others what He has done in your own life.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #6—an interactive poster representing Joshua's stone memorial. The purpose of this poster is to provide students with an opportunity, like Joshua, to signify specific acts of God in their lives. One way to do this would be to allow students the opportunity to write on the stones a word or short phrase that relates to God's past or current work in their lives. It can be anything as general as "God's grace last summer" or specific as "Mom's struggle with cancer." No matter the descriptions, the point is for this to serve as a reminder for students God's work of grace in their life.

SOURCES

1. Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?* (Baker Books, 2011), p. 181.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject