

# Wonders Among You

Joshua 3:1-17

Israel prepares and crosses the Jordan, everyone playing their part: Joshua, the officers in the army, the priests and Levites, and the people of Israel. God does wonders among them like He did in Egypt when they walked through the Red Sea, but now instead of fleeing danger, Israel walks into it.

## Summary of the Text

Joshua gets up early and they head out from Shittim to the Jordan (v. 1). After three days the officers instruct the people to follow the ark of the covenant, borne by the priests and Levites, but not too close so they can see the way forward (vv. 2-4). Joshua instructs the people to sanctify themselves for the Lord will do wonder among them, and tells the priests to take before the people (vv. 5-6). The Lord tells Joshua that He will exalt him as He did Moses so Israel will know the Lord is with him (v. 7). Joshua then tells Israel that this is how they'll know the living God is among them and that He will drive out the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorite and Jebusites, when the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth crosses the Jordan, when the feet of the priests rest in the Jordan, and the waters of the river stand up in a heap (vv. 8-13). When they got there the priests dipped their feet in because the Jordan gushes during harvest and would wash them away (vv. 14-15). The waters stood up in heap upstream and the people walked through on dry ground (vv. 16-17).

## Sanctify Yourself

The word “sanctify” means to make holy, to set apart for a specific use in service to God. The Lord wants everyone not to be there but see what He does for His people: “Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you” (v. 5). At Sinai this meant washing clothes and refraining from sexual relations, ceremonial actions that prepared the people to honor the Lord and witness His actions (Ex. 19:10, 15). He also set them about half a mile from the ark so they could see what was going on. We are finite creatures and need to be prepared to receive the gifts of God and see what He does in our midst. To sanctify yourself requires you to rely on Him to cleanse you. A faithful confesses his sin. In chapter two we saw Rahab hearing about and trusting in what the Lord will do. Now the whole nation must do the same. An untrusting heart could say, “It makes no difference whether I confess my sins or not, whether go to church or not, whether I do this or that—look at all the hypocrites in church who pray!” In one sense it doesn't make a difference. Hypocrites exist. And that Jordan River will part regardless of whether some people went through the motions. The older generation also walked through the Red Sea—and perished in the wilderness. If you neglect the disciplines of grace (prayer, Scripture, confession of sin, worship, living in community where we love one another) you will not see the wonders God does among us.

## Joshua in Charge

One of the unseen wonders God does is raise up Joshua. The Lord tells him as much (v. 7). To whom much is given, much is required, so this can go one of two ways. Given much power and honor, Joshua can become proud and foolish. Or with humility he can know his exaltation is all of grace and itself the greatest reason for more humility. Joshua bears all the marks of strength: he is clearly gifted, commands with authority, leads with vision, and follows through with action. He explains to Israel what God will do but also what it means: “By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you” (v. 10). Like Moses, he empowered the commanders and supported the priests and Levites (cf. Num. 11:29; Ex. 18). We live in a time when many people are cynical about all leadership. Masculinity in itself is labeled toxic. But the antidote to bad leadership is good leadership, not no leadership. Critics and cynics in Israel would point to Moses' failure to enter the promise land, to Joshua's fears, to the character of Rahab the harlot, to the

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size, strength, and wealth of the seven Canaanitic nations. What about the parting of a hundred-foot wide river changes any of that? The faithful in Israel look for God to do wonders.

## Seeing & Believing

Love bears all things, believes all things, hope all things, and endures all things. Love rejoices in the truth (1 Cor. 13:6-7). Twice Joshua speaks of God as “the Lord of all the earth” (vv. 11, 13). He would have to be to part this river gushing over its banks in harvest. It’s likely well over ten feet deep and impossible to ford or cross. The first part of the scene wouldn’t make for good tv, priests and Levites awkwardly making their way down to the raging river, balancing the ark on poles and trying not to fall in get washed down river. Faith includes trusting God right now in the things you see and hear, resting in forgiveness and joy in what He has provided as we do when we say grace at a meal. Faith also follows Him through the river and into the land, trusting for wonders that need to be done: “Who among you fears the Lord? Who obeys the voice of His servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God” (Is. 50:10). John Calvin commented on this passage, “There cannot be a doubt that this wonderful sight must have been received with feelings of fear, leading the Israelites more distinctly to acknowledge that they were saved in the midst of death. For what was that collected heap but a grave in which the whole multitude would have been buried, had the waters resumed their naturally liquid state?” As much as we don’t recommend second baptisms, crossing the Jordan was like one, reminding us that Israel was baptized in the sea (1 Cor. 10:1-2), and clearly looked forward to Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River where the Father declared, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”, and sent the Spirit upon Him. He entered into the land, proclaimed the good news, drove out demons, healed diseases, and ultimately accomplished our salvation. It’s because of Him that we see the wonders of God still at work among us.