

# Mount Olive Baptist

Joshua • Preparation for the Future • Joshua 3:1-17 •

## MAIN POINT

God calls us to prepare presently for His future work in our lives. God is always faithful to respond to our obedience to His call.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Imagine you were going on a vacation to a destination several hundred miles away from your home. What steps would you take to prepare for the journey?**

**If we expect God to move in our lives in a mighty way, how do we prepare for the journey following God's leading?**

Think of all the preparation that goes into taking a short trip with your family—reservations for lodging, directions to your destination, travel arrangements, clothing and other necessities—and this list doesn't include all that you have to plan for when you arrive at your destination. Taking a trip requires lots of diligent planning, but if we are not careful, we will give more planning to our vacations than to planning for God's work in our lives. God was about to do some amazing things for the people of Israel. But before God fulfilled His promises, He called the people to faith and obedience through preparation for His future work. Similarly, if we wish to see God continue to work in our future, we must take the initiative to prepare today.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read Joshua 3:1-6.

**What happened in the history of the people of Israel to lead them up to this point?  
How had God been faithful to them? How has God been faithful to you personally?  
What about our church as a whole?**

**What did the people of Israel expect God to do once they crossed the Jordan? What do you expect God to do as you face challenges in your life?**

Everything God's people had experienced led them up to this point. God created a people for Himself through the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God used Jacob's son Joseph to safely bring His people into Egypt to protect them from the coming famine. God's people flourished and multiplied in Egypt until there arose a king over Egypt who did not know Joseph (Ex. 1:8), who enslaved and oppressed the Israelites for many years until God rescued them from slavery through His servant Moses. Once out of slavery, the people disobeyed God and were forced to wander in the wilderness, until this moment where Moses' successor, Joshua, was ready to lead them out of the wilderness and into God's promised land. It took longer than many had hoped, but God was faithful to them, and He is faithful to us today.

**What had God called Joshua to do, and what role did the community play in God's plan? What are some ways we commit to God's work and prepare for God's future?**

God had called Joshua to lead the people into the promised land, and this was not something Joshua could do alone. All the directions in this passage are given within the context of the community of the people of Israel. God's work didn't merely involve Joshua, but officials, priests, and every person of Israel. God works through individuals, but more often, God works through vibrant communities of faith that are committed to knowing Him and pursuing Him together. When we commit to God's work in the church, we commit to prepare for what He has called us to do.

**God's people were to follow the Ark of the Covenant. What was significant about this object? What was inside of it, and what were its contents designed to help the Israelites remember?**

The Ark of the Covenant was an ornate wooden box that contained three things: manna to symbolize God's provision in the desert; Aaron's rod, which Moses used to divide the Red Sea and show God's power; and a copy of the Ten Commandments to remind them to obey God. These elements were to remind the Israelites of God's faithfulness and what their response to that faithfulness should be.

God promised to do wonders among His people if they simply followed Him in obedience. While we may not see God rain manna from heaven or part an enormous body of water as He did for Israel, God still works in miraculous and unexpected ways in the midst of His people.

| Have a volunteer read Joshua 3:7-13.

**God told Joshua to instruct the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant to go before the people and stand in the Jordan River. Why would this have required significant**

**faith on the part of the priests?**

**How do you think God's past action and the people's preparation, as instructed by Joshua, readied them for this moment?**

The command of God to stand in the Jordan was no small task. Further context in verse 15 tells us the Jordan would have been at its most chaotic during this time. God was asking the priests to trust Him with their very lives. However, God was not calling the people to move forward recklessly, but to trust Him and remember His faithfulness from the past. Even in their failures, God had shown himself to be faithful throughout generations. Though the priests were called to step into the Jordan, God was calling them to stand on His promises.

**Joshua responded obediently to God's instruction and passed it on to the people. How have you responded in times when you felt God calling you to do something that brought on fear and uncertainty?**

| Have a volunteer read Joshua 3:14-17.

**What was the result of the people's obedience? To what degree did God respond? How do you think this moment served to build further faith for the people of Israel?**

The priests acted in obedience to the instruction of God through Joshua. As God promised, the water of the Jordan stood still. Not only did the water stand still, but also the land was dry for a significant distance. Often, God responds to our obedience with abundance. Though we may be fearful of following God, He often provides more than we can ask or imagine.

**God used the obedience of a few to provide for all of Israel. How might God use your obedience to impact your community, and even the nation?**

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**How has God been faithful to you? When have you seen Him do something that defied all logic, reason, or explanation?**

**God asks all of us to follow Him in obedience. For Joshua and the Israelites, that meant crossing the Jordan. What does obedience look like for you personally at this time in your life?**

**Who do you know that needs the gospel but seems impossible to reach? How does this passage from Joshua encourage you in God's work in seemingly impossible**

circumstances?

## PRAYER

Pray that God would help you be obedient in moments that seem overwhelming. Ask God to help you prepare your heart now for His work in the future. Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of times in the past where God has worked in unexpected ways.

## COMMENTARY

| Joshua 3:1-17

3:1. Acacia Grove is the place where Israel had been since Balaam's failed attempt to curse them (Num 22:1; 25:1). This was some miles from the actual place where they crossed the Jordan River. In the south opposite Jericho, this meandering river was at that time surrounded by thickets, so it was not a place suitable for a stay of any length (Jer 12:5). The key word crossing again occurs here (see note at 1:2).

3:2-5. On the officers, see note at 1:10. The ark of the covenant was the symbol of the presence of God among His people. The considerable distance of 1,000 yards may suggest the need to remain away from the presence of God, especially as a miracle was happening. This separation of a holy God from His people occurred at Mount Sinai (Ex 19:10-25). The command to consecrate yourselves recalls Ex 19:10-15 where consecration was defined as the washing of clothes and as abstinence from sexual relations. This would allow God to work through the people to accomplish His wonders—a term that describes the plagues of Egypt in Ex 3:20 and more general acts in Ex 34:10.

3:6. Joshua's first instructions to the priests appear here. Note that the verse describes their precise obedience to his words.

3:7. God's promise of His presence with Joshua accompanied a promise to exalt Joshua (as also Abram in Gen 12:2) as a seal on his leadership over Israel.

3:8. Here is the first example of the Jordan River being used as a place where God chose to cleanse and redeem believers. Others included Naaman in 2Ki 5:10-15 and those baptized by John the Baptist (Mt 3:1-6).

3:9. This is Joshua's first speech to the Israelites. His concern that they come closer and listen suggests the importance of attention to God and His word.

3:10. The phrase living God appears elsewhere only three times in the OT. In Hos 1:10 it is used in the context of the fulfillment of God's promises of an innumerable people who belong to Him. In Ps 42:2 and 84:2 it describes the deepest yearnings of the psalmist, who longed for the presence of God and intimacy with Him. The concern for the presence of God and His fulfillment of His promises for His people are both present here. The Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites describe the pre-Israelite inhabitants of the land. "Canaanites" is a general term referring to those living in the land of Canaan, although it may also describe the indigenous peoples of the land.

3:11. The ark's passage, using the key word "cross over" (1:2), demonstrates God's leadership of His people, His presence with them, and His fulfillment of His promises. The Lord of all the earth uses a phrase identical to that charged against the spies in 2:3 ("the entire land"). While God is indeed Lord of all the earth, the expression in chapters 2 and 3 focuses on "the whole land" of Canaan.

3:12. The 12 men introduces a third group in addition to the people who will follow the ark and the priests who will carry it. The purpose of these men is explained in 4:2-3.

3:13. The mass of the water is the same term as that used of the waters of the Red Sea in Ex 15:8 and Ps 78:13. God would act for His people when they crossed the Jordan River just as He did with the previous generation at the exodus.

3:15. At spring flood, after the winter rains and during the barley harvest, the Jordan River could reach a width in excess of 100 feet and a depth of 10 feet. The priests as the leaders of the people were the first to step down into the water. Doing so was a risky activity with the river at flood stage. Carrying the ark could easily have caused them to be swept away by the current unless the promised miracle took place.

3:16-17. The town of Adam is modern Tell ed-Damiye, about 17 miles north of Jericho. Zarethan may be either three or 11 miles north of Adam, depending on which site it is identified with (Tell Umm Hamid or Tell es-Sa'idiyeh). Taking into account the distance from Adam to the Dead Sea, this means that approximately 29 percent of the Jordan Valley was affected (R. Hess, Joshua, p. 105). Wordplay ties together the actions of the priests and people with God's miracle of the waters. Thus the same verb (Hb 'amad) describes how the waters stood still and how the priests stood firmly. The priests stood on dry ground while the people crossed on dry ground. The water was completely cut off (Hb tammu) until all Israel had finished (Hbtammu) crossing the river.