

Group Study Questions – Joshua 3–4

Emphasis: Joshua 3:14–4:9 (NKJV)

Joshua 3–4 shows faith in motion. God leads, the priests step, the waters stop, the people cross, and stones are raised so no one forgets. The story emphasizes action: God acts first, but His people must respond with obedient footsteps.

It also beautifully points forward. The Jordan later becomes the place where Jesus is baptized and revealed as the beloved Son (Matthew 3:13–17). Joshua leads Israel into the land through the Jordan, but Jesus enters the Jordan as the greater Savior who will lead His people into true redemption.

Forward Connections to Christ and the Gospels

Joshua 3–4 records Israel crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land. There is no direct Gospel “parallel” in the sense of the same event repeated, but there are strong forward connections.

The Jordan River later becomes the place where **John the Baptist prepares the way** and where **Jesus is baptized** (Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:28–34). In Joshua, Israel passes through the Jordan into the land of promise. In the Gospels, Jesus enters the Jordan at the beginning of His public ministry, identifying with His people and being declared the beloved Son of God (Matthew 3:16–17).

The ark going before the people also points forward thematically. The ark represented God’s presence among Israel (Exodus 25:21–22). In the Gospel of John, Jesus is the Word made flesh who “dwelt among us” (John 1:14). God’s presence is no longer centered in the ark, but fully revealed in Christ.

The memorial stones in Joshua 4 also connect with the biblical pattern of remembering God’s works and teaching future generations. In the New Testament, the Lord’s Supper becomes a repeated act of remembrance centered on Christ’s death (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24–26).

1. Why does God have the ark go before the people into the Jordan? (*Joshua 3:1–13*)

The ark of the covenant represented the presence and rule of God among Israel (Exodus 25:21–22). Joshua tells the people to watch the ark because they “have not passed this way before” (Joshua 3:4). Israel is entering unfamiliar territory, and God’s presence must lead them.

This is not mainly a story about Israel’s bravery or Joshua’s strategy. It is about God going first. The priests carrying the ark step into the river before the people cross, showing that Israel’s way forward depends on God’s presence and promise.

This connects with Jesus’ promise to His disciples: “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20). God’s people are never called to move forward apart from His presence.

Everyday Application: When we face unfamiliar seasons, the most important question is not, “Do I know everything ahead?” but “Am I following God’s direction?” Faith learns to let God lead before demanding full certainty.

2. Why is the timing of the crossing important? (Joshua 3:14–15)

Joshua notes that the Jordan “overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest” (Joshua 3:15). Israel is not crossing at an easy moment. Humanly speaking, this is the wrong time to cross. Yet that is exactly when God commands them to move.

This makes the miracle unmistakable. Just as God parted the Red Sea when Israel left Egypt (Exodus 14:21–22), He now stops the Jordan as they enter Canaan. The same God who delivered them out of bondage is bringing them into promise.

Everyday Application: God’s timing may not look convenient. Sometimes obedience comes when circumstances appear harder, not easier. But difficult timing can become the setting where God’s faithfulness is most clearly seen.

3. What is significant about the priests stepping into the water before it stops? (Joshua 3:15–16)

The waters stop after the priests’ feet touch the edge of the water. This detail matters. God had promised what He would do, but the priests had to step forward in obedience before they saw the river stand still.

This echoes the action emphasis of Joshua 1:3: “Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you.” God gives the promise, but His people must walk in obedient faith. Later, James says faith is shown by works (James 2:17–18).

Everyday Application: Faith often has footsteps. We may want God to remove the obstacle before we move, but sometimes He calls us to take the next obedient step while the water is still in front of us.

4. What does the dry ground reveal about God’s power and care? (Joshua 3:16–17)

The waters stand in a heap, and all Israel crosses “on dry ground” (Joshua 3:17). This phrase intentionally reminds us of the Red Sea crossing, where Israel also passed through on dry ground (Exodus 14:22).

God does not merely make a narrow escape route; He makes a stable path. The entire nation crosses safely. This shows both His power over creation and His care for His people.

This also prepares the nations to know that the Lord’s hand is mighty (Joshua 4:24).

Everyday Application: God is not only able to open a way; He is able to sustain us as we walk through it. Sometimes we focus on whether God can start something, but Joshua reminds us He can carry His people all the way through.

5. Why does God command twelve stones to be taken from the Jordan? (Joshua 4:1–7)

God tells Joshua to have twelve men take twelve stones from the Jordan, one for each tribe. These stones become a memorial. When children later ask, “What do these stones mean to you?” the people are to tell how the Lord cut off the waters of the Jordan before the ark (Joshua 4:6–7).

The stones are not magic objects. They are teaching tools. God wants His mighty works remembered, retold, and passed to the next generation. This fits the pattern of Passover, where children ask about the meaning of the meal and parents retell God’s deliverance (Exodus 12:26–27).

Everyday Application: We need reminders of God’s faithfulness. Families, churches, and individuals should intentionally remember and tell what God has done. If we do not rehearse God’s faithfulness, we may forget it when the next challenge comes.

6. Why are stones placed both in the camp and in the Jordan? (Joshua 4:8–9)

Joshua 4:8 describes the twelve stones taken from the Jordan and set up at the lodging place. Joshua 4:9 also says Joshua set up twelve stones “in the midst of the Jordan” where the priests stood.

The stones at the camp were visible reminders for future generations. The stones in the Jordan marked the place where the priests stood with the ark while the people crossed. Together, they point to both public testimony and hidden faithfulness. Some reminders are visible to others; some mark places only God fully sees.

The focus remains the same: God brought His people through.

Everyday Application: Not every act of faithfulness is visible to others, but it still matters. Some moments with God become public testimonies; others remain private markers of His help. Both can strengthen our faith.

7. How does this crossing strengthen Joshua’s leadership? (Joshua 3:7; 4:14)

God tells Joshua, “This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel” (Joshua 3:7). After the crossing, Joshua 4:14 says the people feared him as they had feared Moses.

This does not mean Joshua becomes important for his own glory. Rather, God confirms Joshua as the leader who will carry forward the mission after Moses. Just as Moses led Israel through the Red Sea, Joshua leads them through the Jordan. God’s presence with Joshua validates the leadership transition.

This also connects back to Joshua 1:5: “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you.”

Everyday Application: Godly leadership is not built mainly on personality or position. It is strengthened when people see obedience, dependence on God, and faithfulness under pressure.

8. What is the larger purpose of the Jordan crossing and the memorial stones? (Joshua 4:20–24)

Joshua explains that the stones are a witness so future generations will know that Israel crossed the Jordan on dry land. But the purpose is even larger: “that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever” (Joshua 4:24).

So the crossing is not only for Israel’s encouragement. It is also a testimony to the nations. God’s acts among His people reveal His power and call others to recognize Him.

This points forward to the Gospel mission. Jesus tells His followers to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). God’s work in His people is meant to become witness through His people.

Everyday Application: God’s faithfulness to us is not only for our comfort. It becomes part of our witness. When we tell what God has done, others may be strengthened, encouraged, or drawn to seek Him.