

### C. Crossing the Jordan (3:1-4:24)

“A holy God leads his consecrated people across the last natural barrier with a great miracle and a memorial for future generations.” [NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible, p. 353]

“The book of Joshua is all about the promised land: its possession (chs. 1-12), its distribution (chs. 13-21) and its retention (chs. 22-24). On the other side, it is also about the dispossession of ‘the wicked’ from the land. The land fit for kings was given to a people fit to be kings (see. Jos. 12)... The Creator of the whole earth (Pss. 24:1-2; 47:4) and unique Owner of Palestine (Lv. 25:23) made the patriarchs trustees of a land fit for kings, flowing with milk and honey (Dt. 31:20). He promised to give it to their descendants as a permanent inheritance (Gn. 17:8; Ex. 32:13). The occupation of the land, to be taken by stages (see 13:1-7), was launched dramatically by Joshua. It was then ‘allotted’ by God to Israel’s tribes by casting lots (Nu. 33:50-54), and to become their inalienable possession which no one could take forcibly from them. Only the Levites received no land of their own; instead they ‘inherited’ the LORD himself, opening the way to a spiritual understanding of the inheritance....

“Both the land and the salvation in Christ are a gift (1:2, 6; cf. Rom. 6:23), possessed only through faith (1:7, 9; cf. Rom. 10:18-21; Eph 1:8-9). They are both a place of blessing (ex. 3:8; Nu. 13:27; Eph. 1:3-14), a home base of rest (Jos. 1:13; Heb 4:1-11) and a holy place where one uniquely meets God (Ex. 15:17; Col. 3:1-4:1; 1 Tim. 2:5-6). They both demand a life-style that conforms with God’s law (1:7-8; 8:30-35; 1 Cor. 10:1-13). Through the new covenant Christ qualifies his church to live in this ‘land’ fit for kings (Ezk. 37:26). And yet though the church today inherits eternal life and rest in Christ Jesus, after its resurrection it will enjoy more solid ‘land’ appropriate to that state (cf. 1 Cor 15:50-54; Heb. 11:39-40). The ‘land’ remains a gift already received but not yet fully experienced.” [Bruce Waltke, “Joshua,” *The New Bible Commentary* edited by G. J. Wenham, J. A. Motyer, D. A. Carson, and R. T. France, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 235]

“In our Bible the story of the crossing of the Jordan River is spread over three chapters, Joshua 3-5. But it is actually one story, and these chapters should be taken together for the story’s full effect....

“In these chapters there are three closely related events: (1) the crossing of the Jordan, (2) the erecting of a memorial to the crossing, and (3) the renewal of the covenant and the effecting of the covenant sign at Gilgal after the crossing of the Jordan but prior to the beginning of the conquest of the land.” [Boice, p. 36]

“Crossing the Jordan marked the moment when Israel breached the last barrier to the promised land and so escaped the desert. The divine Warrior, symbolized by his ark, led them into the swollen Jordan, dried it up, protected them throughout and led them into the promised land.

“During most of the year the Jordan can be forded easily (cf. Jdg. 3:28; 8:4), but God waited until early spring (when it was in full flood, principally from the melting snows on Mt. Hermon) to lead Israel across, thereby exalting Joshua in the eyes of the nation (6) and making Israel to know that the living God was among them (8, 13).” [Waltke, *New Bible Commentary*, p. 240]

“Though they were not yet told how they should pass the river, and were unprovided for the passing of it in any ordinary way, yet they went forward in faith, having been told (Joshua 1:11) that they should pass it. We must go on in the way of our duty though we foresee difficulties, trusting God to help us through them when we come to them. Let us proceed as far as we can, and depend on divine sufficiency for that which we find ourselves not sufficient for. In this march Joshua led them, and particular notice is taken of his early rising as there is afterwards upon other occasions (Joshua 6:12; 7:16; 8:10), which intimates how little he loved his ease, how much he loved his business, and what care and pains he was willing to take in it. Those that would bring great things to pass must rise early. *Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty.*” [Matthew Henry’s *Commentary II*, p. 11]

“There are four speeches preparing the people for the crossing: one by the officers to the people (2-4), one by Joshua to the people and to the priests (5-6), one by the LORD to Joshua (7-8), and one by Joshua to the whole nation (9-13). Each speech reveals a bit more about the marvel to happen, reaching a climax in Joshua’s final address.” [Waltke, *New Bible Commentary*, p. 240]

“The first crossing of the sea [at the Exodus] was made very easy... The strong east wind blew and divided the sea before the people had to cross; not a foot was wet...

“But how different it was on the second occasion, when God taught them to obey without, as it were, making it first of all impossible to disobey. The priests had to stand still in the water of the river. What a sight for men to scoff at, that standing still in the water! But it was not till they obeyed, and without a particle of visible proof that they were doing right, went on to carry the ark right into the river, that the water rolled back before them.” [Amy Carmichael, *Candles in the Dark*, (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1981), p. 41]

“If God bear us in his arms when we are children, yet when we are well-grown, he looks we should go on our own feet; it is enough that he upholds us, though he carry us not.” [Hall I, p. 237]

### 1. **The Crossing Commenced** (3:1-6)

“We must remember, as I formerly explained, that Joshua did not move his camp till the day after the spies had returned, but that after hearing their report, he gave orders by the prefects that they should collect their vessels, as three days after they were to cross the Jordan.” [Calvin’s *Commentaries* IV, p. 57]

“The Jordan was not crossed then by bridges nor by ferry boats; the only way of crossing was by fords. The ford nearest to Jericho, now called-El Mashra’a, is well known; it was the ford the Israelites would have used had the river been fordable; and perhaps the tradition is correct that there the crossing actually took place. When the spies crossed and recrossed the river it must have been by swimming, as it was too deep for wading at the time; but though this mode of crossing was possible for individuals, it was manifestly out of the question for a host. That the Israelites could by no possibility cross at that season must have been the forlorn hope of the people of Jericho; possibly they smiled at the folly of Joshua in choosing such a time of the year, and asked in derision, How is he ever to get over?

“The appointed day for leaving Shittim has come, and Joshua, determined to lose no time, rises ‘early in the morning.’ Nor is it without a purpose that so often in the Old Testament narrative, when men of might commence some great undertaking, we are told that it was early in the morning. In all hot climates work in the open air, if done at all, must be done early in the morning or in the evening. But, besides this, morning is the appropriate time for men of great energy and decision to be astir; and it readily connects itself with the New Testament text — ‘Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.’ The benefits of an early start for all kinds of successful work are in the proverbs of all nations; and we may add that few have reached a high position in the Christian life who could not say, in the spirit of the hymn, ‘early in the morning my song shall rise to Thee.’ Nor can it easily be understood how under other conditions the precept could be fulfilled — ‘Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.’

“From Shittim to the banks of the Jordan is an easy journey of a few miles, the road being all over level ground, so that the march was probably finished before the sun had risen high. However strong their faith, it could not be without a certain tremor of heart that the people would behold the swollen river, and mark the walls and towers of Jericho a few miles beyond. Three days are to be allowed, if not for physical, certainly for moral and spiritual preparation for the crossing of the river. The three days are probably the same as those adverted to before (Joshua 1:3), just as the order to select twelve men to set up twelve stones (Joshua 3:12) is probably the same as that more fully detailed in Joshua 4:2. The host is assembled in orderly array on the east bank of the Jordan, when the officers pass through to give instructions as to their further procedure. Three such instructions are given.

“First, they are to follow the ark. Whenever they see the priests that bear it in motion, they are to move from their places and follow it. There was no longer the pillar of fire to guide them — that was a wilderness-symbol of God’s presence, now superseded by a more permanent symbol — the ark. Both symbols represented the same great truth — the gracious presence and guidance of God, and both called the people to the same duty and privilege, and to the same assurance of absolute safety so long as they followed the Lord. Familiar sights are apt to lose their significance, and the people must have become so familiar with the wilderness-pillar that they would hardly think what it meant. Now a different symbol is brought forward. The ark carried in solemn procession by the priests is now the appointed token of God’s guidance, and therefore the object to be unhesitatingly followed. A blessed truth for all time was clearly shadowed forth. Follow God implicitly and unhesitatingly in every time of danger, and you are safe. Set aside the counsels of casuistry, of fear, and of worldly wisdom; find out God’s will and follow it through good report and through evil report, and you will be right. It was thus that Joshua and Caleb did, and counseled the people to do, when they came back from exploring the land; and now these two were reaping the benefit; while the generation, that would have been comfortably settled in the land if they had done the same, had perished in the wilderness on account of their unbelief. Secondly, a span of two thousand cubits was to be left between the people and the ark. Some have thought that this was designed as a token of reverence; but this is not the reason assigned. Had it been designed as a token of reverence, it would have been prescribed long before, as soon as the ark was constructed, and began to be carried with the host through the wilderness. The intention was, ‘that ye may know the way by which you must go’ (ver. 4). If this arrangement had not been made, the course of the ark through the fiat plains of the Jordan would not have been visible to the mass of the host, but only to those in the immediate neighborhoods, and the people would have been liable to straggle and fall into confusion, if not to diverge altogether. In all cases, when we are looking out for Divine guidance, it is of supreme importance that there be nothing in the way...to distort our vision. Alas, how often is this direction disregarded! How often do we allow our prejudices, or our wishes, or our worldly interests to come between us and the Divine direction we profess to desire!... It is only when our eye is single that the whole body is full of light. This clear space of two thousand cubits between the people and the ark deserves to be remembered. Let us have a like clear space morally between us and God when we go to ask His counsel, lest peradventure we not only mistake His directions, but bring disaster on ourselves and dishonor on His name.

“Thirdly, the people were instructed, — ‘Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.’... Expect great things, prepare for great things; and let the chief of your preparations be to sanctify yourselves, for ‘the foolish shall not stand in His sight, and He hateth all workers of iniquity.’

“Next day (compare ver. 5, ‘tomorrow,’ and ver. 7, ‘this day’) Joshua turns to the priests and bids them ‘take up the ark of the covenant.’ The priests obey; ‘they take up the ark, and go before the people.’... The taking up of the ark by the priests was a decisive step. There could be no retreating now from the course entered on. The priests with the ark must advance, and it will be seen whether Joshua has been uttering words without foundation, or whether he has been speaking in the name of God.” [Blaikie, p. 657-658]

“When the children of Israel went through the Jordan, they were told that the Jordan would divide before them, but they were still more fully assured when the priests went forward with the ark; for as soon as the feet of the priests touched the margin of the river, the waters began to divide. As they saw their priests march through the bed of the stream, and come up on the other side, all doubts about the security of the passage must have vanished at once, for the priests were the representatives of the people before God, and where they passed safely all Israel might go. See ye then, my brethren, the ‘Great High Priest of our profession’ has led the van, the ark of the eternal covenant has gone before, death is dried up, so that we can say, ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’ And you and I may with perfect confidence, full of a lively

hope, march onwards into the glory land, for Jesus Christ hath safely passed the flood, and even so shall we.” [Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* XVI, (1870), p. 488-489]

“Rahab, in mentioning to the spies the *drying up of the Red Sea* (Joshua 2:10), the report of which terrified the Canaanites more than anything else, intimates that those on that side the water expected that Jordan, that great defense of their country, would in like manner give way to them. Whether the Israelites had any expectation of it does not appear. God often *did things for them which they looked not for*, Isaiah 64:3.” [Matthew Henry’s *Commentary* II, p. 11]

“He that hitherto had gone before them in the cloud, doth now go before them in the ark; the same guide in two diverse signs of his presence.” [Hall I, p. 237]

“...The people were directed to follow the ark. Officers were appointed to go through the host to give these directions (v. 2), that every Israelite might know both what to do and what to depend upon.... They might depend upon the ark to lead them; that is, upon God himself, of whose presence the ark was an instituted sign and token. It seems, the pillar of cloud and fire was removed, else that would have led them... It is called here the *ark of the covenant of the Lord their God*. What greater encouragement could they have than this, that the Lord was their God, a God in covenant with them? Here was the *ark of the covenant*; if God be ours, we need not fear any evil. He was nigh to them, present with them, went before them: what could come amiss to those that were thus guided, thus guarded?... The people must follow the ark: *Remove from your place and go after it*, (1) As those that are resolved never to forsake it.... (2) As those that are entirely satisfied in its guidance, that it will lead in the best way to the best end; and therefore, *Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest*.... They must follow the priests as far as they carried the ark, but no further; so we must follow our ministers only as they follow Christ.” [Matthew Henry’s *Commentary* II, p. 11]

“It was a new thing that the ark should become the guide of the people. All through the wilderness, according to the history, it had been carried in the center of the march, and had had no share in the direction of the course. That had been done by the pillar of cloud. But, just as the manna ceased when the tribes got across the Jordan and could eat the bread of the land, the miracle ending and they being left to trust to ordinary means of supply at the earliest possible moment, so there ensued an approximation to ordinary guidance, which is none the less real because it is granted without miracle. The pillar of cloud ceased to move before the people in the crossing of the Jordan, and its place was taken by the material symbol of the presence of God, which contained the tables of the law as the basis of the covenant. And that ark moved at the commandment of the leader Joshua, for he was the mouthpiece of the divine will in the matter.” [Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* II, p. 103]

“The ark was a rectangular box...made of acacia wood, and measured...c. 4 x 2(1/2) x 2(1/2) feet... The whole was covered with gold and was carried on poles inserted in rings at the four lower corners. The lid, or ‘mercy-seat’, was a gold plate surrounded by two antithetically placed cherubs with outspread wings.

“The ark served (i) as receptacle for the two tablets of the Decalogue (Ex. 25:16, 21); 40:21; Dt. 10:1-5) and also for the pot of manna and Aaron’s rod (Heb. 9:4-5); (ii) as the meeting place in the inner sanctuary where the Lord revealed his will to his servants (Moses: Ex. 25:22; 30:36; Aaron: Lv. 16:2; Joshua: Jos. 7:6). Thus it served as a symbol of the divine presence guiding his people.” [K. A. Kitchen, “Ark of the Covenant,” *New Bible Dictionary*, edited by G. J. Wenham, J. A. Motyer, D. A. Carson, and R. T. France, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 82]

“God leads the way through our unknown tomorrows.” [Wayne Barber, *Pulpit Helps*, (May 2004), p. 6]

“It is called *the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth*. ‘He that is your God (v. 9), in covenant with you, is the *Lord of all the earth*, has both right and power to command, control, use, and dispose of all nations and of all creatures. He is the *Lord of all the earth*, therefore he needs not you, nor can he be benefited by you; therefore it is your honor and happiness to have him in covenant with you: if he be yours, all the creatures are at your service, and when he

pleases shall be employed for you.” When we are praising and worshipping God as Israel's God, and ours through Christ, we must remember that he is the *Lord of the whole earth*, and reverence him and trust in him accordingly.” [Matthew Henry's Commentary II, p. 13]

“As the younger Levites, whose province it was to carry the ark, (Numbers 4:15) were strictly forbidden to touch it, or even to look at it, when uncovered, it is not wonderful that the common people were not allowed to approach within a considerable distance of it. The dignity of the ark, therefore, is declared, when the people are ordered to attest their veneration by leaving a long interval between themselves and it. And we know what happened to Uzzah, (2 Samuel 6) when seeing it shaken by restive oxen, he with inconsiderate zeal put forth his hand to support it. For although God invites us familiarly to himself, yet faithful trust so far from begetting security and boldness, is, on the contrary, always coupled with fear.” [Calvin's Commentaries IV, p. 59]

“In following the ark, they must *keep their distance*, v. 4. They must none of them come within a thousand yards of the ark.... This charge to them not to come near was agreeable to that dispensation of darkness, bondage, and terror: but we now through Christ have access with boldness.” [Matthew Henry's Commentary II, p. 11]

“What awful respects doth God require to be given unto the testimonies of his presence! Uzzah paid dear for touching it; the men of Beth-shemeth for looking into it. Though the Israelites were sanctified, yet they might not come near either the mount of Sinai, when the Law was delivered, or the ark of the covenant, wherein the Law was written.” [Hall I, p. 238]

“The command to keep a gap of *about a thousand yards*...between them and the ark gave all Israel a full view of God's wondrous leadership.” [Waltke, *New Bible Commentary*, p. 240]

“General instructions had been already issued that the host was to follow the ark, leaving two thousand cubits between them and it; but nothing had been said as to how Jordan was to be crossed. No doubt many a question and doubt had been muttered by the watch-fires, as the people looked at the muddy, turbid stream, swirling in flood. The spies probably managed to swim it, but that was a feat worthy to be named in the epitaph of heroes (1 Chronicles 12:15), and impossible for the crowd of all ages and both sexes which followed Joshua. There was the rushing stream, swollen as it always is in harvest. How were they to get over? And if the people of Jericho, right over against them, chose to fall upon them as they were struggling across, what could hinder utter defeat? No doubt, all that was canvassed, in all sorts of tones; but no inkling of the miracle seems to have been given.” [Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* II, p. 108-109]

“Herein lies the true test of faith, to lean so on the counsel of God, as not to keep inquiring too anxiously concerning the mode of action or the event.” [Calvin's Commentaries IV, p. 60]

“They were commanded to sanctify themselves, that they might be prepared to attend the ark; and with good reason: For *tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you*.... The people of Israel were now entering into the holy land, and therefore must sanctify themselves.” [Matthew Henry's Commentary II, p. 12]

“Ere God will work a miracle before Israel, they have charge to be sanctified>” [Hall I, p. 239]

“The attitude of expectation of God's help, while its nature is unrevealed, is kept up in Joshua's last instruction. The people are bidden to ‘sanctify themselves, because tomorrow the *Lord will do wonders*’ among them.... The best security for tomorrow's wonders is today's sanctifying.” [Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* II, p. 109]

“...When all were in readiness, Joshua publicly unfolded the divine message which he had received.... First, then, it is related that the priests were enjoined by Joshua to bear the ark before the people; and secondly, lest any one might think that he was making the attempt at random, or at his own hand, mention is at the same time made of the promise with which he had been furnished as a means of ensuring his command. But although it is not then distinctly said that the course of the Jordan would be interrupted, yet, from the language which Joshua used to the people, we may infer that the Lord spoke more in detail, and explained more distinctly what he had determined to do.” [Calvin's Commentaries IV, p. 60-61]

“The command to the priests discloses to them a little more, in bidding them pass over before the people, but the additional disclosure would only be an additional trial of faith; for the silence as to how so impossible a command was to be made possible is absolute. The swollen river had obliterated all fords; and how were priests, staggering under the weight of the ark on their shoulders, to ‘pass over’? The question is not answered till the ark is on their shoulders.... But the bearers of the ark need never fear but that the God to whom it belongs will take care of it and of them.” [Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* II, p. 109-110]

“The priests were ordered to take up the ark and carry it *before the people*, v. 6. It was the Levites' work ordinarily to carry the ark, Numbers 4:15. But on this great occasion the priests were ordered to do it.” [Matthew Henry's *Commentary* II, p. 12]

## 2. The Crossing Described (3:7-17)

“In verses 7-17 we have the narrative of the actual crossing, in its three divisions of God's command (vs. 7-8), Joshua's repetition of it (vs. 9-13), and the historical fact (vs. 14-17). The final instructions were only given on the morning of the day of crossing. The report of God's commands given in verses 7 and 8 is condensed, as is evident from the fuller statement of them in Joshua's address to the people, which immediately follows. In it Joshua is fully aware of the manner of the miracle and of the details of the crossing, but we have no record of his having received them. The summary of that eventful morning's instructions to him emphasizes first the bearing of the miracle on his reputation. The passage of the Red Sea had authenticated the mission of Moses to the past generation, who, in consequence of it, ‘believed God and His servant Moses.’ The new generation are to have a parallel authentication of Joshua's commission. It is noteworthy that this is not the purpose of the miracle which the leader announces to the people in verse 10. It was a message from God to himself, a kind of gracious whisper meant for his own encouragement. What a thought to fill a man's heart with humble devotion, that God would work such a wonder in order to demonstrate that He was with him! And what a glimpse of more to follow lay in that promise, ‘This day will I *begin to magnify thee!*’ [Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* II, 110]

“We may observe here how God honors Joshua, and by this wondrous work he is about to do designs to make Israel know that he is their governor, and then how Joshua honors God and endeavors by it to make Israel know that he is their God.” [Matthew Henry's *Commentary* II, p. 12]

“From verses 7 and 10 we learn the purpose of this miracle as being twofold. It was intended to stamp the seal of God's approbation on Joshua, and to hearten the people by the assurance of God's fighting for them.... The miracle which led Israel into the wilderness is repeated as they pass from it. The first stage of their deliverance and the second are begun with analogous displays of divine power. The same arm which cleft the sea is stretched out, after all sins, for the new generation, and ‘is not shortened that it cannot save.’ God does not disdain to duplicate His wonders, even for very unworthy servants. The unchanging, long-suffering patience, and the unwearied strength to which all generations in succession can turn with confidence, are wonderfully set forth by these two miracles.” [Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* II, p. 114]

“*Hereby you shall know that the living God* (the true God, and God of power, not one of the dead gods of the heathen) *is among you*, though you see him not, nor are to have any image of him...and therefore you shall, nay, he himself *will, without fail, drive out from before you the Canaanites*.... What should hinder him? What can stand in his way before whom rivers are divided and dried up?... This assurance which Joshua here gives them was so well grounded that it would enable one Israelite to chase a thousand Canaanites, and two to put then thousand to flight; and it would be abundantly strengthened by remembering the song of Moses, dictated forty years before, which plainly foretold the dividing of Jordan and the influence it would have upon the driving out of the Canaanites. Exodus 15:15-17, ‘*The inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away*, and so be effectually driven out; they shall be as still as a stone till thy people pass over, and then thou shalt bring them in and plant them.’” [Matthew Henry's *Commentary* II, p. 13]

“Observe the grand emphasis of that name, ‘the living God,’ tacitly contrasted with the dead idols of the enemies, and sealing the assurance of His swift and all-conquering might.”... Observe, too, the triumphant contempt in the enumeration of the many tribes of the foe with their barbarous names. Five of them had been enough, when named by the spies’ trembling lips, to terrify the congregation, but here the list of the whole seven but strengthens confidence. Faith delights to look steadily at its enemies, knowing that the one Helper is more than they all.” [Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* II, p. 111] Cf. Numbers 13:25-29

“The list of seven nations occurs 23 times, with omissions and additions and in various sequences... The Hittites are always named (cf. Ezek 16:3)... The **Girgashites** cannot be located, though the name occurs in Ugaritic and (possibly) Hittite.” [John P. U; Lilly, “Joshua,” *Zondervan Bible Commentary* edited by F. F. Bruce, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), p. 223]

“He makes the power of the miracle extend further than to the entrance of the land, and deservedly; for merely to open up a passage into a hostile territory, from which there was afterwards no retreat, would have been nothing else than exposure to death.... Joshua therefore declares beforehand, that when God would restore the river to its course, it would just be as if he were stretching forth his hand to rout all the inhabitants of the land; and that the manifestation of his power given in the passage of the Jordan, would be a sure presage of the victory which they would obtain over all the nations.

“He says, Hence shall you know that the Lord is present with you; to what end? Not only to plant your feet in the land of Canaan, but also to give you full possession of it.... As the Lord by dividing the river clearly showed that his power resided with the Israelites, so the people must on their part have conceived hopes of perpetual assistance, as much as if they had already seen their enemies worsted and lying prostrate before them.

“For God does not abandon the work of his hands midway, leaving it maimed and unfinished. (Psalm 138:8) When he leads his people unto the promised inheritance, he makes a dry passage for them by cutting off the course of the Jordan. How perverse then would it have been for the Israelites to stop short at that momentary act, instead of feeling confident in all time to come, until quiet possession of the land were actually obtained! Let us learn then from this example, prudently to combine the different acts of divine goodness relating to our final salvation, so that a happy commencement may cherish and keep alive in our minds the hope of an equally happy termination.” [Calvin’s *Commentaries* IV, p. 61-62]

“First he says that the ark of God will go before; and secondly, he explains for what purpose, namely, that Jordan may retire from its place, trembling, so to speak, at the presence of the Lord, as is said in the Psalms. (Psalm 114.)... Jordan was compelled to yield obedience to God just as if it had beheld his majesty.” [Calvin’s *Commentaries* IV, p. 62-63]

“Then follows the command to elect twelve representatives of the tribes, for a purpose not yet explained... The brief anticipatory announcement of the miracle puts stress on the arrest of the waters at the instant when the priests’ feet touched them, and tells what is to befall the arrested torrent above the point where the ark stood, saying nothing about the lower Stretch of the river, and just hinting by one word ‘heap,’ the parallel between this miracle and that of the passing of the Red Sea: ‘The floods stood upright as an heap’ (Exodus 15:8).” [Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* II, p. 112-113]

“...It must therefore be done in such a way as had no precedent but the dividing of the Red Sea: and that miracle is here repeated, to show that God has the same power to finish the salvation of his people that he had to begin it, for he is the *Alpha* and the *Omega*...” [Matthew Henry’s *Commentary* II, p. 13]

“Verses 14-17 narrate the actual crossing. One long sentence, like the roll of an Atlantic wave, or a long-drawn shout of triumph, masses together the stages of the march; the breaking up of the encampment; the solemn advance of the ark, watched by the motionless crowd; its approach to the foaming stream, running bank-full, as is its wont in the early harvest months; the decisive moment when the naked feet of the priests were dipped in the water. What a hush of almost

painful expectation would fall on the gazers! Then, with a rush of triumph, the long sentence pours on, like a river escaping from some rocky gorge, and tells the details of the transcendent fact. Looking up stream, the water ‘stood’; and, as the flow above went on, it was dammed up, and, as would appear, swept back to a point not now known, but apparently some miles up. Looking down the course, the water flowed naturally to the Dead Sea; and, in effect, the whole bed southwards was quickly left bare, giving room for the advance of the people with wide-extended front, while the priests, with the ark on their shoulders, stood silent in the midst of the bed, between the heaped waters and the hasting host. Verse 17 gives the usual summary sentence, which partly anticipates what is still to follow, but here comes in with special force, as gathering up the whole wonderful scene, and recounting once more, and not without a ring of astonished triumph, how the priests stood firm on dry ground in that strange place, ‘until all the nation were passed clean over Jordan.’” [Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* II, p. 113]

“The valor of the priests in proceeding boldly beyond the bed into the water itself, was deserving of no mean praise, since they might have been afraid of being instantly drowned.” [Calvin’s *Commentaries* V. p. 64]

“The same power, that divided the red sea before Moses, divides Jordan before Joshua, that they might see the...hand of God as present with Joshua to bring them into Canaan, as it was with Moses to bring them out of Egypt.... The waters knew their maker.... How glorious a God do we serve! whom all the powers of the heavens and elements are willingly subject unto, and gladly take the nature which he pleases to give them.” [Hall I, p. 239-240]

“Keep in fellowship with the Apostle and High Priest of your profession. Consider Him. Look away from all else to Him. Follow Him. It may seem as if He is leading thee to certain destruction; but it shall not be so. When thou comest to the dreaded difficulty, be it what it may, thou wilt find that because His feet have been dipped in its brink, it has dwindled in its flow. Its roar is hushed; its waters are shrunken; its violence is gone.... The riverbed is dry. Jericho is within reach.” [F. B. Meyer in Moody, *One Thousand and One Thoughts from My Library*, p. 45]

“...This river was now broader and deeper than usually it was at other times of the year, v. 15. The melting of the snow on the mountains of Lebanon, near which this river had its rise, was the occasion that at the time of harvest, barley-harvest, which was the spring of the year, Jordan overflowed all his banks. This great flood, just at that time (which Providence might have restrained for once, of which he might have ordered them to cross at another time of the year) very much magnified the power of God and his kindness to Israel.” [Matthew Henry’s *Commentary* II, p. 14]

“Now must the Israelites needs think, how can the Canaanites stand out against us, when the seas and rivers give us way?... What a sight was this to their heathen adversaries to see the waters make both a lane and a wall for Israel!” [Hall I, p. 240-241]

“3:17 relates in summary form the crossing of the people and the fact that the priests remained in the midst of the river until the people had crossed. After the people had crossed, Joshua issued directions for the erection of the memorial stones (4:1-10). During this time the priests were still standing in the river. 4:10 serves as a summary of that that had occurred, and adds the information that the people had passed over quickly. 4:11...completes the narrative by stating that *finally* (i.e., after the people had crossed) the priests and the ark passed over the river.” [Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 174]

### 3. **The Crossing Concluded** (4:1-3)

“This chapter is divided into two sections. The first (from verses 1 to 14) has as its main subject the bringing up of the twelve memorial stones from the bed of Jordan; the second (verse 15 to the end) gives the conclusion of the whole incident.... Each section has God’s commands to Joshua, Joshua’s to the people, and the execution of these. To each is appended a summary, which anticipates the more detailed particulars that follow.” [Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* II, p. 115-116]

#### D. **Erecting a Memorial** (4:4-24)



“...When the people were all across, Joshua, who had apparently remained on the eastern bank with the twelve representatives of the tribes, received God’s command to tell these the purpose for which they had been chosen, and to set them to execute it.... Verses 4-8 tell Joshua’s communication of the instructions to the men; verse 8 narrates the execution of them by each man’s wrenching up from the river’s bed a great stone, with which he toiled through the muddy ooze to the western shore, and thence over the hot plain to Gilgal, where the host camped.... “ [Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* II, p. 116]

“I do not see Joshua hastening through the channel, as if he feared lest the tide of Jordan should return; but, as knowing that watery wall stronger than the walls of Jericho, he paces slowly; and, lest this miracle should pass away with themselves, he commands twelve stones to be taken out of the channel of Jordan.... There did the ark rest while we walked dry-shod through the deeps of Jordan...” [Hall I, p. 241]

“Clearly, the twelve men selected by Joshua were to take up twelve stones and assemble them as a memorial on the west bank of the river.... The difficulty comes from the fact that Joshua 4:9 *literally* says Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan on the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant stood.... Were there two memorials?... In my judgment, the New International Version is right in thinking that the words *had been* should be assumed in verse 9. If they are, the sentence would speak of setting up the twelve stone that *had been* in the Jordan where the priests *had stood*.... The command of God to Joshua and through him to the people concerns only one memorial. Joshua could have decided to add a second one entirely on his own...but this is not in keeping with...God’s original instructions to him to obey the Lord implicitly in all things and not to turn aside from God’s law, either to the right or to the left.... Second, in telling the story, verse 9 seems to explain what happened to the stones taken from the Jordan, not how an additional collection of stones was set up. In this sequence we are told first that the twelve men bore the stones up out of the Jordan and put them down in the camp (v. 8). Then we are told that Joshua set them up as a memorial (v. 9). It is also significant that at the end of the chapter, when the stones are again mentioned, nothing is said of a second memorial in the Jordan....

“The people needed a memorial because, like ourselves, they tended to forget the goodness and mighty acts of God on their behalf.

“The story gives three specific reasons for this memorial. First, the generation that was entering the land to conquer it needed a memorial, because the road ahead would be hard and there would be times when they would become discouraged... By returning to Gilgal on a regular basis, as they did, since Gilgal was their base of operations, they would see the stones and be reminded of the power and faithfulness of the great God who was with them, leading them in their conquest.

“Second, the generations to come would need this memorial, since children easily forget the faith and instructions of their parents....4:6-7....21-23.” [Boice, p. 39-40]

“Here, as well as elsewhere, the people are reminded to tell their children of God’s mighty acts in past history so that the children might not forget and might remain faithful to their parents’ God.” [The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer II, p. 216]

“Third, the people of the earth needed the memorial as a testimony to the existence and nature of the one true God...v. 24.” [Boice, p. 40]

“...The stones were to tell the other nations roundabout that this God is different. He really exists; He is a living God, a God of real power who is immanent in the world.” [The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer II, p. 216]

#### **E. Renewing the Covenant (5:1-12)**

“Israel have now got over Jordan, and the waters which had opened before them, to favor their march forward, are closed again behind them, to forbid their retreat backward.” [Matthew Henry’s Commentary II, p. 18]

“Israel had experienced a great miracle, the enemy was frightened, and God was at work. Now was the time for action! *But God told His people to wait.* Why? So that He might prepare them for

the conquest of the land." [Warren W. Wiersbe, *With the Word: A Devotional Commentary*, (Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1991), p. 132]

"The incidents at Gilgal. Verse 2 ('at that time') connects with v. 1, and vv. 3-9 obviously reflect upon v. 2. Verse 10 continues the narrative, and relates the observance of the Passover. Verse 11 connects with v. 10 (after the passover). And v. 12 connects with v. 11 ('old corn')." [Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 175]

"The interesting thing about the reaffirmation of the covenant is that it was the exact opposite of what worldly wisdom would advise. No doubt this was apparent to Joshua and the others too, for it follows the report of the terror of the people living in the land.... Worldly wisdom would have called for an immediate attack while the people of the land were disheartened and before they could make last-minute preparations. Instead, God called for a three-day delay while Israel observed two sacraments.

"Moreover, the sacrament of circumcision totally disabled the army for a time. We know the effects of circumcision from Genesis 34.... The Shechemites had been totally incapacitated by the rite, but it was precisely this rite that Joshua inflicted on his own troops at God's command." [Boice, p. 41]

"The whole male population would have been rendered helpless for the time, and an invitation would have been given to the men of Jericho to commit such a massacre as in the like circumstances the sons of Jacob inflicted on the men of Shechem (Genesis 34:25). Why was not this business of circumcising performed while the host were lying inactive on the other side, and while the Jordan ran between Israel and his foes? It was because the kings of the Canaanites were petrified. It is true they plucked up courage by-and-by, and many of the kings entered into a league against Joshua. But this was after the affair of Ai, after the defeat of the Israelites before that city had showed that, as in the case of Achilles, there was a vulnerable spot somewhere, notwithstanding the protection of their God. Meanwhile the people of Jericho were paralyzed, for though the whole male population of Israel under forty lay helpless in their tents, not a finger was raised by the enemy against them." [Blaikie, p. 662]

"In the book of Exodus we find....Moses was on his way to lead the Israelites out of bondage. He had been away from his people for forty years. He had married a wife who was not a Jew and had male children who were not circumcised. Before he could begin his leadership, something had to happen. 'And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art because of the circumcision' (Ex. 4:24-26).

"What does this story mean? Simply this...: God actually pointed out to Moses and Moses was not ready to lead God's people until the body of his own son was marked with the sign of the covenant if grace... When Zipporah had performed, Moses could lead the people.

"At Gilgal, because the males were uncircumcised, the Israelites were not ready to fight the battle of the Lord. They must first bear the mark of the covenant. As soon as the people were circumcised, they were ready to proceed." [*The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer II*, p. 222-223]

### 1. Circumcision (5:1-9)

"Circumcision symbolizes putting off what belongs to the sinful flesh (Rom. 8:13; Col. 2:11-12) and devoting the heart wholly to the Lord (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4)." [Wiersbe, *With the Word*, p. 132]

"...The 'Hill of Foreskins' (i.e. 'Gibeath Haaraloth') gained its name from this occasion (v. 3)." [Andrew C. Bowling, "Joshua," *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* edited by Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), p. 140]

"**rolled away the reproach of Egypt.** Perhaps this describes the disgrace of slavery in Egypt. Alternatively, the obedience of the present generation (signaled by their practicing circumcision) contrasts with the disobedience of the first generation that left Egypt." [*NIV Biblical Study Bible*, p. 355]

“You can never take Jericho...till you have been circumcised, till God has taken away your self-reliance, and has brought you down into the dust of death; then, when the sentence of death is in yourself, you will begin to experience the energy of the divine life, the glory of the divine victory.” [Meyer, *Joshua*, p. 54]

“The visible token of his being one of God’s children was now borne by every man and boy in the camp.” [Blaikie, p. 662]

## 2. **Passover** (5:10-12)

“What, then, was the Passover? The Passover...looked two ways — back to the liberation from Egypt and forward to the coming of the Lord as Savior.... Paul says, ‘Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us’ (I Cor. 5:7).” [*The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer II*, p. 224]

“We know (Numbers 9:5) that the Passover was kept the second year after they left Egypt, but no other reference to it occurs in the history. On this, as on many other points connected with the wilderness history, we must be content to remain in ignorance. We are not even very sure how far the ordinary sacrifices were offered during that period. It is quite possible that the considerations that suspended the rite of circumcision applied to other ordinances. But whether or not the Passover was observed in the wilderness, we may easily understand that after being circumcised the people would observe it with a much happier and more satisfied feeling. There were many things to make this Passover memorable. The crossing of the Jordan was so like the crossing of the Red Sea that the celebration in Egypt could not fail to come back vividly to all the older people, — those that were under twenty at the exodus, to whom the sentence of exclusion from Canaan did not apply (Numbers 14:29). Many of these must have looked on while their fathers sprinkled the lintels and doorposts with the blood of the lamb, and must have listened to the awful death-cry of the firstborn of the Egyptians. They must have remembered well that memorable midnight when all were in such excitement marching away from Egypt; and not less vividly must they have remembered the terror that seized them when the Egyptian host was seen in pursuit; and then again the thrill of triumph with which they passed, between the crystal walls, under the glow of the fiery pillar; and once more the triumphant notes of Miriam’s timbrel and the voices of the women, ‘Sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider He hath cast into the sea.’ And now these days of glory were coming back! As surely as the passage of the sea had been followed by the destruction of the Egyptians, so surely would the passage of the Jordan be followed by the destruction of the Canaanites.” [Blaikie, p. 663]

“On reaching the Land of Promise, the thoughts of the people were guided back to the great fact of redemption by blood that lay at the basis of their existence.” [Meyer, *Joshua*, p. 57]

“Three important events are recorded here: The celebration of Passover, the halting of the manna, and eating the produce of the land... Eating the produce of the land marks the first step in appropriating the land. The ceasing of the manna marks the end of a provision necessary only during the wanderings outside the land.” [Bowling, p. 140]

“Manna was a wonderful mercy to them when they needed it. But it was the mark of a wilderness state...” [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary II*, p. 21]

The manna ceased “to teach us not to expect extraordinary supplies when supplies may be had in an ordinary way. If God had dealt with Israel according to their deserts, the manna would have ceased when they called it light bread; but as long as they needed it God continued it, though they despised it; and now that they needed it not God withdrew it...” [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary II*, p. 21]

## F. **Meeting the Commander** (5:13-15)

“We have hitherto found God often speaking to Joshua, but we read not till now of any appearance of God’s glory to him; now that his difficulties increased his encouragements were increased in proportion. Observe, I. The time when he was favored with this vision. It was immediately after he had performed the great solemnities of circumcision and the passover; then God made himself known to him.... II. The place where he had this vision. It was *by Jericho*....

Joshua was in his post as a general, when God came and made himself known as Generalissimo” [Matthew Henry’s Commentary II, p. 22]

“We were reading this morning, Joshua v., the manna ceased only when they really had crossed the Jordan, and, as for the Cloudy Pillar, no notice is taken of its ceasing excepting this. The Lord says: ‘As Captain of the host am I now come.’ It was as much as saying: ‘I have hitherto led you through the wilderness in the Cloud, but now the end of that is come, and so I appear as Captain of the host leading you all into the land.’” [Bonar, *Diary and Life*, p. 159]

“He tells Joshua that he is neither for Israel or her enemies. He is *commander of the army of the LORD...not an ally.*” [Bruce K, Waltke, *New Bible Commentary*, p. 243]

“...*I now come*, not only for you as a friend, but over you as commander in chief.” [Matthew Henry’s Commentary II, p. 22]

“Who was this wonderful military Stranger? Surely none other than the uncreated Angel of the Covenant, the Lord of the angels, He whom all the angels worship. It was Jehovah Himself who had come to visit Joshua, as He had appeared in patriarchal times to Abraham, and Jacob, and Moses. The same Angel had gone before the children of Israel for forty years in the pillar of cloud and fire. At the Red Sea, on the night of the Exodus, He had delivered the nation of bondmen from Pharaoh and his host; and now He appears as the Heavenly Leader of Israel in the conquest of the land of Canaan.” [The Speaker’s Bible II, p. 237]

“If the appearance of the soldier was a surprise, his answer to the question must have been a greater. ‘Nay; but as Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come.’ The ‘nay’ deprecates his being either friend or foe in the common sense, but especially his being foe. His position and his office are far more exalted. As Captain of the host of the Lord, he is at the head, not of human armies, but of all the principalities and powers of heavenly places,

‘The mighty regencies  
Of seraphim and potentates and thrones.’

“And now the real situation flashes on Joshua. This soldier is no other than the Angel of the Covenant, the same who came to Abraham under the oak at Mamre, and that wrestled with Jacob on the banks of this very Jordan at Peniel. Joshua could not but remember, when God threatened to withdraw from Israel after the sin of the golden calf, and send some created angel to guide them through the wilderness, how earnestly Moses remonstrated, and how his whole soul was thrown into the pleading — ‘If Thy presence go not with us, carry me not up hence.’ He could not but remember the intense joy of Moses when this pleading proved successful ‘My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.’ There could be little doubt in his mind who this ‘Captain of the host of Jehovah’ was, and no hesitation on his part in yielding to Him the Divine honor due to the Most High.” [Blaikie, p. 665] Cf. Hebrews 2:10

“The moment that Joshua understood with whom he was conversing, he fell on his face, and offered to his visitor not only obeisance but worship, which the visitor did not decline. And then came a question indicating profound regard for his Lord’s will, and readiness to do whatsoever he might be told — “What saith my Lord unto His servant?” It cannot but remind us of the question put by Saul to the Lord while yet lying on the ground on the way to Damascus — ‘Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?’” [Blaikie, p. 666]

“...Christ was his Lord and himself his servant and under his command, Christ his Captain and himself a soldier under him, to do as he is bidden, Matthew 8:9.” [Matthew Henry’s Commentary II, p.23]

“It was the judicial sword, demanding the death of men who had been tried for their sins, long warned, and at last judicially condemned. The iniquity of the Amorites was now full. We know what kind the people were who dwelt near Jericho four or five hundred years before, while the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah stood in the plain, cities that even then were reeking with the foulest corruption. It is true the judgment of God came down on these cities, but bare judgments

have never reformed the world. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah removed the foulest stain-spot for the time, but it did not change the hearts nor the habits of the nations. It has seemed good to the Spirit of God to give us one glimpse of the foulness that had been reached at that early period, but not to multiply the filthy details at a future time, — after the long interval between Abraham and Joshua. But we know that if Sodom was bad, Jericho was no better. The country as a whole, which had now filled up its cup of iniquity, was no better. No wonder that the Angel bore a drawn sword in His hand. The long-suffering of the righteous God was exhausted, and Joshua and his people were the instruments by whom the judicial punishment was to be inflicted. The Captain of the Lord's host had drawn His sword from its scabbard to show that the judgment of that wicked people was to slumber no more." [Blaikie, p. 666]