

HOW SHALL WE STUDY OUR OLD TESTAMENTS? - Part Five

Sunday, April 12th, 2026 - 5:30 p.m.

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We have much ground to cover in the text. We'll be studying **Joshua 3:7 - 4:18**. Perhaps the key point for our purposes is made in **3:7** - **"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.'"**

The issue here isn't the *omnipresence* of God, as though Joshua didn't realize God didn't die with Moses. The issue is the *way* in which God would be *with* Joshua: **"....as I was with Moses, so I will be with you"(3:7)**. And the book of Joshua is *full* of references deliberately comparing God's presence with Moses and God's presence with Joshua:

Joshua 4:10 - "For the priests bearing the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua. The people passed over in haste."

Joshua 4:14 - "On that day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they stood in awe of him just as they had stood in awe of Moses, all the days of his life."

Joshua 4:23 - "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...."

There is a reason for all of these comparisons between Moses and Joshua. God is so loving and gracious. He won't allow Joshua to forget a very simple, basic, quickly stated promise given to him by God back in **Joshua 1:5 - "No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you."**

Please forgive me for pausing over a truth so apparent and basic. But we constantly need to hear the first lesson God gives Joshua on the manifestation of His power in his life. The content of the promise is so ample, clear, and precious. Hear the love of God in it. Never argue with it. Allow it to settle deeply into your present situation - ***"Joshua, Moses is dead now. You can only look back with fond memories at all that I did through his life. But Joshua, it's very important for you to know that my power didn't die with Moses. You can count on my power in your generation just as surely as he did in his."***

Listen, there's not one of us who doesn't need that promise quickened in his or her life. Unbelief is **relentless** in its march on our minds. In everyone of us there is the not so subtle frame of mind that **looks back with fondness, even joy, at what God did in the pages of Scripture**. But when *I* need God's intervention in **my** life, especially in a very dramatic way, how hard it is for me to honestly believe His gracious love and power are quite as much directed to **me** as they were to those of Biblical saints of **bygone years**. And as politely as I might hedge my bets, that's just **unbelief**.

Now I'm not denying God had a very special call and purpose for men like Moses and Joshua. And I'm not denying God worked some very dramatic miracles at special times and places for His covenant people, Israel. I understand that. But the apostle James also points out another side of the coin:

James 5:17-18 - "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. [18] Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit."

Now Elijah was a great man, specifically called and used by God in his day. No one's denying that. But that *isn't* the point of this text in James. James isn't referring to Elijah to point out how *different* he was from us or how much *more* God was interested in him than the rest of us poor slobs. The point is the exact opposite. The point, says James, is God and Elijah both knew he was a man *just like us*. And the point is, even though Elijah lived a long time ago, God didn't die with Elijah and His power is unchangeable. So the power of prayer is just as available to people like you and me as for Elijah the prophet.

And now God comes to Joshua with the same message of warning and hope. The *warning* is Joshua is not to link God's power with Moses as though God were *unwilling* to work through Joshua. Don't bury God with some past saint. He is constantly *contemporary*. And that's also the message of *hope*. God loves to *franchise* His power wherever there is a willing, trusting heart through whom He can work. "Joshua, you don't have to fear. You can be of good courage and trust my Word because *just as I was with Moses, I'll be with you.*"

There are *ways* in which God's power is manifested in Joshua's experience. We're going to look at some of them in a marvellous portion of our text:

Joshua 3:7 - 4:7 - "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. [8] 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.' " [9] And Joshua said to the people of Israel, "Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God." [10] 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. [11] Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. [12] Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man. [13] 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."

[14] “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, [15] 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), [16] 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. [17] 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..... [4:1] “When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, [2] "Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, [3] and command them, saying, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight.' " [4] Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe.”

[5] “And Joshua said to them, “Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, [6] that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, ‘What do those stones mean to you?’ [7] then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever.”

1) **FAITH IS FORTIFIED BY TRUSTING IN GOD’S POWER FOR FUTURE PROVISION AS WELL AS PRESENT NEED**

This is covered in **Joshua 3:7-13**, but to save some time simply take note of **verse 10** - “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.”

For us those names at the close of the verse are just boring, hard to pronounce entities. They don't **mean** anything to us. But to Joshua and the Israelites those names represented ***everything that stood in the way of their future inheritance and blessing***. Those were the names that seemed to **oppose** everything good and important that God had for them. And God has something to say about them - something He doesn't want His people to ever forget: ***"Don't just trust me for the deliverance you are presently seeing - the parting of the Jordan river - but for the removal of all those obstacles that you know you will face down the road, and aren't removed as of yet!"***

God was saying that in the rolling back of those flood waters, there was also the promise of the stretching out of His hand against all of the enemies they were still to face. That ***didn't*** mean they wouldn't have to fight battles. But it ***did*** mean, as they walked in faithful obedience to God, they never had to **wonder** or **guess** whether He would be there for them or not.

In the power of His **present** parting of the Jordan River God wasn't only with them to ***help them plant their feet finally in the promised land***. He was also with them to ***ensure the full possession of that land***.

That has tremendous importance for all of us. God is never just out to excite you into taking on some new resolutions in terms of your home, or your devotional life, or the defeating of some stubborn sin, or the fulfilling of a new spiritual commitment. Let me encourage you with this principle this morning. Not only in this passage, but all through the Bible, God does not start something in our lives only to give up on it half way - **Psalm 138:8** - "**The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.**"

Remember, that principle does **not** apply to every cockeyed scheme I might devise selfishly for my life. That's why we started last week talking about the courage to obey **God's Word**. There is the promise of God's blessing and presence to those who walk in His way and are never swayed off course. Remember last week's lesson. It takes courage to never even "**look to the right or to the left.**" That's never **easy** to do. But such a life always **carries God's power** along with it into the future.

2) **THERE IS THE POWER THAT COMES FROM FOLLOWING GOD IN OBEDIENCE**

Joshua 3:15-16 - “....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), [16] 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.”

The writer doesn't bother to state the obvious. Because the river had overflowed its banks, it had come up over the channel's edge and seeped up over the shoreline. ***There was no way of knowing where you were putting your feet.*** Where would the bottom under your feet suddenly disappear? At what point would your footing slip away? It all seemed so uncertain.

Also, the water didn't roll back ***until they began to put their feet, one after another into the rushing current.*** They could have stood praying on the river bank all day and ***nothing would have happened.*** The power ***followed*** the obedience. There was no miracle until their feet were wet.

I'm wondering how many people are here, knowing full well what God wants them to do in some area of their lives, but who are just plain ***afraid*** to do it because they aren't sure of what the outcome of their actions will be. And if that describes you today find some old saint who's been around the block with Jesus a few times and knows what life's all about. They'll tell you, "Quit stalling. Life is far shorter than you presently think. If God's calling, get your feet in there. The waters never part with your pondering. The way will open up when you obey the Lord."

3) **THERE IS THE POWER THAT COMES FROM A LIFE OF WORSHIP TO THE LORD**

Let me re-read some of the key verses - **Joshua 3:15-17** - "....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), [16] 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."

[17] “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.”

There's a sense in which this whole passage isn't about the Jordan river at all. It's about the ark of the Lord. The writer labors to centralize the ark in everything else that happens. Everything seems to find its **cause** in that ark carried along on the shoulders of the priests. As the priests lead the way into the water, the flooding waters stand up in a heap or wall (**3:15-16**). The waters remained divided as long as the ark remained in the center of the Jordan (**3:17**).

We just completed an entire series of teachings on **why worship matters**. This single verse pictures it beautifully. The priests and the ark don't rush on **through** the Jordan along with the masses. They stop and stay. They **dwell** in the middle of all that would drown life and strength out of Israel. Worship is **planted** in the middle of the flood. Worship is involved in **holding back** all that would wash over and overwhelm life.

How could God better call us to **keep the regular worship of the Lord** in the center of our lives? How else could He so graphically **show** how much worship matters? The **business** of life - the **trials** of life - the **strain** of life - all the things we usually use as **excuses** to worship **less**, God sees, not as **distractions** from worship, but **reasons** for worship. Life **will** overwhelm you, like the flood waters of the Jordan, without the sustaining, protecting, blessing power of worship. Remember it all your life.

There is one more point of God's **continuing power** from the fourth chapter of Joshua. Let's look at it just quickly in closing:

- 4) **WE MUST PASS ON THE LIVING LEGACY OF A GOD WHO WORKS POWERFULLY FOR THOSE WHO HONOR HIM**

Joshua 4:1-7 - "When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, [2] "Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, [3] and command them, saying, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight.' " [4] Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. [5] And Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, [6] that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' [7] then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever."

What wonderful words. **Why** is it so important to God that the people build an altar of heavy stones? Why this ritual? Joshua will learn something important about the **continuing power of God**. God wasn't just with **Moses**. He will be with **Joshua**. And one day, much farther down the time line, He will be with **Daniel**, and **David**, and **Ruth**, and **Simon Peter**, and **Doubting Thomas**, and **John** on the Isle of Patmos.

But how will the people know - long after Joshua is off the scene - about the **continuing** power of God? We **do** tend to forget. We tend to cut ourselves off from the lessons of the past and the provision for the future.

Back to our original question - **why** does God take such pains to make them **remember** His river-parting power? He does it because He knows better than they that this isn't their last trial. He calls them to remember because **they** will need to remember, not because **He's** just insecure about His performance.

On some sunny day none of the Israelites is even thinking about right now their children are going to be wandering around in their new land. They will play as kids do, and one or two of them will be playing “King of the Castle” on an old, oddly stacked pile of huge stones. Or, they’ll just **bump into them** while thinking about something else. And God says they’ll ask a question - **Joshua 4:6-7** - “**....When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?'**[7] **then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord....”**

“Tell them about my power!” That’s beautiful. “That pile of rocks will force your testimony. They need to know this. **Why?** Because there will be other mountains to climb and other rivers to cross. And I want to open a way for **them** just as I did for **you.**”