

# Step By Step

## Joshua 3:6-15

### Dr. Pierre Cannings

#### I. Step One v.6

##### i. Priest

1. What is important in the context is that the emphasis of the verse is upon the ark. The priests are placed in a quite secondary position in the grammar of the sentence and in the view of the writer. The people are to look for the ark and follow it
2. We see this in the portrayal of the priests in this chapter: they are introduced in 3:3, but their role is made clearer in 3:8, and then clearer still in 3:13. We also see it in the repetition of the crossing motif at several points: 3:1, 14, 16, 17; 4:1, 10, 11

##### ii. Carry -Take up the Ark v.6

##### 1. The Ark of the Covenant

- a. Joshua now focused the Israelites' attention on the ark by using an attention-getting word *hinnēh* ("See!" "Look!" "Behold!"). The ark was to be their guide, and its position at the water's edge would signal the beginning of the miracle.
- b. The ark surprises us here. We are not really prepared for its appearance. Joshua has said nothing about it. Deuteronomy mentioned it as the home of the Decalogue (10:1–5) and the Deuteronomic law (31:26) and as the identifying mark of the Levitical priests (10:8; 31:9, 25). The ark had appeared first in the Exodus account of the construction of the wilderness sanctuary (chaps. 25–31; 35–40), where it is set up in the holiest place where God met Moses (25:22; 30:6; cf. Num 7:89).
- c. These different titles of the ark appear to reflect different stages in its history and function within Israel and her theological reflections. They give another indication of the history of theological reflection which lies behind the present passage. Each of the narratives in our section show

a stage of the reflection. The first narrative shows the ark as the divine symbol leading the armies of Israel into battle, performing miracles, and promising victory over the enemies

- d. The ark of the covenant is mentioned here for the first time in the Book of Joshua, and it is an important focal point in this chapter. The ark was the most holy physical possession of Israel since it symbolized God's very presence (Exod 25:22; Num 7:89; 10:35–36; 1 Sam 4:4), and it contained three symbols of Israel's relationship with God: (1) the tablets of the Ten Commandments, (2) Aaron the high priest's rod, and (3) a jar of manna (Exod 25:16, 21; 40:20; Heb 9:4). The priests were responsible for carrying it here (v. 3), in accordance with the Mosaic legislation, which accorded that responsibility to the tribe of Levi (Deut 10:8; cf. 31:9). The ark was to be carried with poles and was not to be touched (Exod 25:12–13; 37:3–5; Num 4:4–15). As the symbol of God's presence, a healthy distance was to be maintained between it and the people (Josh 3:4).
- e. These references suggest such a close relationship between the ark and the covenant it represents that it is almost as if the ark *is* the covenant. God, whose very presence is associated with the ark, is closely associated with the covenant as well, and these ways of referring to the ark highlight this.

## 2. The Lord of All the Earth v.13

- a. Israel can know the living God is active for her, driving out her enemies, because she can see his present action. He is present in the ark of the covenant. He is present as Lord of all the earth. This further divine epithet is yet another indication of the theological reflection and development within even the first of the narratives used as sources for this section
- b. Here the Lord is identified as sovereign over all the earth, although the word for "earth" (*'ereṣ*) can also mean "land"; if this is the intended meaning, it is nevertheless appropriate, since the Lord was not only sovereign over all

the earth, but also the entire land of Canaan, which he was in process of giving to Israel.

- iii. Cross over ahead
  - 1. The people will go behind v.3

## II. Step Two vs. 8,13

- i. Edge of the Jordan
- ii. Stand Still in the Jordan 8,13
  - 1. Stand
    - a. *stand upright: remain standing*
    - b. the priests carrying the ark were actually to enter the water and stand there. This anticipates what would happen when they did this: the waters would actually stop flowing
  - 2. Soles of the Feet 13-14
    - a. Rest in the Waters
    - b. *Rest-rest, settle down and remain*
    - c. This is accomplished in several ways: by the many verbs describing the water stoppage in vv. 13 and 16, by the verbs of standing or resting in the Jordan (vv. 8, 13, 15, 17), by the references to high water or dry ground (vv. 15, 17), and by the very syntactical constructions in vv. 14–16. This emphasis is confirmed in chap. 4, where many of the same motifs are repeated: see especially 4:7, 18, 22–23
  - 3. The Jordan will be cut off

## III. Now Step v. 15

- i. So When
  - 1. Having made all necessary preparations, Joshua issued the long-awaited order: Forward. The priests obeyed immediately
- ii. Feet were dipped
  - 1. The commentator was trying to explain a contradiction between this unit, where the Ark-bearers seem to stand near the riverbank, and the next one, where they clearly stand in midstream. How could this have been? Answer: In this first unit, they had entered the water but not the river channel. They could do this because the river was in flood. In fact, during most of the year, the Jordan can easily be forded (Judg 3:28; 8:4; 1 Sam 13:7; 2 Sam 17:24)

2. The scribe who contributed this harmonizing parenthesis understood that the miracle began when they stepped into the floodwaters, before entering the riverbed proper
- iii. Jordan Overflows all the days of Harvest
1. The miracle of the Jordan is heightened in the last half of v 15. At many seasons of the year, the Jordan is a mere trickle of water which could easily be forded. During the spring harvest, melting snows from the northern mountains flooded the riverbed. Only resulting landslides or divine miracles allow crossing in this time of year (cf. 4:19)
  2. center of attention. Everything and everyone else is subordinate to the miracle at the waters. Whereas the opening section of the chapter centered on the person and office of Joshua, these final verses center on the words and actions of Yahweh for Israel at the waters. The living God, the Lord of all the earth, moves before his people and makes good his claims to universal dominion.
  3. The river was **at flood stage**—a foreboding sight to the priests and people and a severe test of their faith. Would they hesitate in fear or would they advance in faith, believing that what God had promised (about the water stopping, 3:13) would actually happen
  4. *The Jordan overflows its banks.* The overflow is associated with late winter to early spring, when the river is at its fullest, swollen by the long winter rains first and later by the melting of snows in the Anti-Lebanon range.

## Commentary Study

<sup>3:3</sup> The ark surprises us here. We are not really prepared for its appearance. Joshua has said nothing about it. Deuteronomy mentioned it as the home of the Decalogue (10:1–5) and the Deuteronomic law (31:26) and as the identifying mark of the Levitical priests (10:8; 31:9, 25). The ark had appeared first in the Exodus account of the construction of the wilderness sanctuary (chaps. 25–31; 35–40), where it is set up in the holiest place where God met Moses (25:22; 30:6; cf. Num 7:89). Later Aaron was allowed to enter but only on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). Among the priests the Kohathites were set apart to care for the ark and sanctuary (Num 3:31), particularly during travel (4:5–15).

A different role for the ark appears in Num 10:33–35, that of leading Israel in her wilderness journeys and wars. Such a role is described only once in Numbers and then negatively (14:44). Josh 3 is the first time the ark actually leads Israel explicitly in the biblical narratives.

The titles given the ark in Josh 3–4 represent a sample of the many titles given the ark throughout the biblical literature. “The ark of the covenant” is basically restricted to Deuteronomistic literature (Deut 10:8; 31:9, 25, 26; Josh 6:6, 8; 8:33; Judg 20:27; 1 Sam 4:3–5; 2 Sam 15:24; 1 Kgs 3:15; 6:19; 8:1, 6; Jer 3:16) taken over later by the Chronicler. The only possible exceptions appear to be Num 10:33; 14:44, and any traditions which lay behind Josh 3–4. To use these as a basis for a wide-ranging theory of covenant theology at Gilgal, as does Otto (*Mazzotfest*, 199–202), is going beyond what the evidence allows.

A second title given the ark is that of the “ark of the Testimony” (4:16), which is not to be wiped away through text critical procedures as would Langlamet (*Gilgal*, 51–54). This title is at home in priestly, cultic literature, based on the understanding that the testimony of God, that is his law, was placed in the ark (Exod 25:16, 21; cf. 25:22; 26:33, 34; 30:6, 26; 31:7; 39:35; 40:3, 5, 21; Num 4:5; 7:89).

Finally, the ark is called the ark of Yahweh (e.g. 3:13), a title also found frequently in the narrative of the ark in 1 Sam 4–6 and 2 Sam 6.

These different titles of the ark appear to reflect different stages in its history and function within Israel and her theological reflections. They give another indication of the history of theological reflection which lies behind the present passage. Each of the narratives in our section show a stage of the reflection. The first narrative shows the ark as the divine symbol leading the armies of Israel into battle, performing miracles, and promising victory over the enemies. In the second narrative the ark has been reduced to a secondary role. Its role is simply that of a cultic object carried by the priests. It is the feet of the priests, the standing place of the priests, the actions of the priests which are significant. The ark has become a customary cult object which one presupposes but whose role is no longer a matter of reflection or real significance.

The final editor adds nothing about the ark. His interests lie elsewhere, in the question of the leadership of Israel.

Verse 3 also introduces the Levitical priests for the only time in the section. The role of the Levites has been much discussed by scholarship. They play a significant role in Deuteronomic literature (von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, 66–69; E. W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and*

*Tradition*, [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967] 73–76; R. Abba, “Priests and Levites in Deuteronomy,” *V<sup>1</sup>T* 27 [1977] 257–67). The introduction of the Levites into this narrative is usually taken as a mark of Deuteronomic editing. What is important in the context is that the emphasis of the verse is upon the ark. The priests are placed in a quite secondary position in the grammar of the sentence and in the view of the writer. The people are to look for the ark and follow it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3:6</sup> Having made all necessary preparations, Joshua issued the long-awaited order: Forward. The priests obeyed immediately. The picture of Joshua the leader following Moses is thus complete. God’s order to Joshua (1:2) has been carried out. Joshua is leading the people over Jordan. Joshua in purifying the camp has followed the rules set up by Moses (cf. 1:7–8). The officials and priests have responded to Joshua’s leadership. The ground is laid for the first divine Word of our section.

<sup>3:8</sup> Joshua again takes the speaking role. Now the goal is different. All that follows points to what God is going to do while the priests are standing (v 8), the people listening (v 9), and Joshua explaining (v 10).

In our context the actions are quite specific. He will drive out the inhabitants of the Promised Land and give the land to his chosen people, Israel. The order of the peoples in v 10 is distinctive within the OT (Langlamet, *Gilgal*, 109–11). The list of the peoples inhabiting the Promised Land reflects a long tradition. Details about each of the peoples named are difficult to establish. The Amarna Letters demonstrate clearly that the political and cultural makeup of Palestine was exceedingly diverse and lacking in unity long before Israel entered. She did not face a common foe. She faced a number of different small city-states, each with its own tradition, people, culture, and god. None of these were any match for the living God of Israel.

<sup>3:11</sup> Israel can know the living God is active for her, driving out her enemies, because she can see his present action. He is present in the ark of the covenant. He is present as Lord of all the earth. This further divine epithet is yet another indication of the theological reflection and development within even the first of the narratives used as sources for this section. The Hebrew term ארץ means either “land” or “earth” depending upon the context. Its meaning in the present context is debated, basically because its original context is debated. The divine epithet appears also in Mic 4:13; Zech 4:14; 6:5; Ps 97:5; 114:7 (the latter following the emendation of Kraus). The epithet may have been at home in the Gilgal cult (H.-J. Kraus, *Psalmen*. vol. 2 [BKA<sup>3</sup>T XV. 2nd ed. Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961] 781; Otto, *Mazzotfest*, 150, 187–88). Kraus (*Psalmen*, vol. 1, 199) speaks of the Jebusite or Canaanite origin of the epithet. Langlamet (*Gilgal*, 112–15) working on the Ugaritic parallels drawn by Maier (*Ladeheiligtum*) and biblical

---

<sup>1</sup>VT *Vetus Testamentum*

<sup>2</sup> Trent C. Butler, [Joshua](#), vol. 7, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1984), 44–45.

<sup>3</sup>BKAT *Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament*

studies of E. Lipinski (*La royauté de Yahwé dans la poésie et le culte de l'ancien Israël*, [Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1965] 173–275) sought to demonstrate that the material taken over from a Canaanite cult has been shorn of mythical elements and reduced to the concerns of Israel, namely the possession of the land of Canaan. Gray (62) takes the other extreme and views the phrase as a late Deuteronomistic elaboration of Deuteronomy 10:14.

The earliest history of the phrase in Israel is perhaps hidden to us. It apparently represents one of the many items appropriated by Israel from its Canaanite heritage and baptized into service to proclaim the greatness of Yahweh, the God of Israel. A limitation of its meaning to the land which Israel sought to possess is possible within an early framework, but such is not strongly witnessed in the present text. Rather, here we may well have the appropriation of the material within the Jerusalem cult, from which spring all other uses of the epithet. At any rate, we have evidence in the several divine idioms of a growth of tradition and a reflection upon the theological significance of the material. When the terminology was read and used by the late Israelite community as it was threatened and finally captured by the nations of the world, the confession of Josh 3:11 would certainly have been seen in a universalistic context, giving hope that Yahweh would once more lead Israel out of the wilderness of the east over the Jordan into the Promised Land.

<sup>3:13–17</sup> With 3:13 a complicated Hebrew sentence structure is introduced. This makes all the action described in vv 13–15 contemporary with and subordinate to the great action of v 16, the formation of a great heap of waters. The waters, the Jordan and waters going down to the sea, are mentioned ten times in the context. They are the center of attention. Everything and everyone else is subordinate to the miracle at the waters. Whereas the opening section of the chapter centered on the person and office of Joshua, these final verses center on the words and actions of Yahweh for Israel at the waters. The living God, the Lord of all the earth, moves before his people and makes good his claims to universal dominion.

<sup>3:15</sup> The miracle of the Jordan is heightened in the last half of v 15. At many seasons of the year, the Jordan is a mere trickle of water which could easily be forded. During the spring harvest, melting snows from the northern mountains flooded the riverbed. Only resulting landslides or divine miracles allow crossing in this time of year (cf. 4:19).<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Trent C. Butler, [Joshua](#), vol. 7, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1984), 46–48.

**3:3** The ark of the covenant is mentioned here for the first time in the Book of Joshua, and it is an important focal point in this chapter.<sup>1757</sup> The ark was the most holy physical possession of Israel since it symbolized God's very presence (Exod 25:22; Num 7:89; 10:35–36; 1 Sam 4:4), and it contained three symbols of Israel's relationship with God: (1) the tablets of the Ten Commandments, (2) Aaron the high priest's rod, and (3) a jar of manna (Exod 25:16, 21; 40:20; Heb 9:4). The priests were responsible for carrying it here (v. 3), in accordance with the Mosaic legislation, which accorded that responsibility to the tribe of Levi (Deut 10:8; cf. 31:9). The ark was to be carried with poles and was not to be touched (Exod 25:12–13; 37:3–5; Num 4:4–15). As the symbol of God's presence, a healthy distance was to be maintained between it and the people (Josh 3:4).

The ark is referred to in various ways in this chapter, the most common phrase being "the ark of the covenant." However, several references to it elevate it to even more prominent status when the Hebrew is read carefully. The following are literal renditions of the Hebrew: In v. 11, the reading is "the ark of the covenant, the Lord of all the earth"; in v. 14, it is "the ark, the covenant"; and in v. 17, we find "the ark, the covenant of the LORD."<sup>1768</sup> These references suggest such a close relationship between the ark and the covenant it represents that it is almost as if the ark *is* the covenant. God, whose very presence is associated with the ark, is closely associated with the covenant as well, and these ways of referring to the ark highlight this.

The "priests, who are Levites," were to carry the ark. Since all legitimate priests were Levites (Num 3:10),<sup>1779</sup> the expression here is redundant.<sup>1880</sup> It may be a special reminder that these priests were indeed legitimate, and thus everything was in order.<sup>1891</sup> Also, the fact that the *priests* were to carry the ark highlights the importance of this special occasion, since it appears

---

<sup>5177</sup> It is mentioned ten times in this chapter (vv. 3, 6 [2x], 8, 11, 13, 14, 15 [2x], 17) and an additional seven times in chap. 4 (vv. 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 16, 18).

<sup>6178</sup> In each case, a definite article is found that breaks up a construct chain. Thus, assuming the text is correct as it stands and assuming a consistent application of the normal canons of Hebrew grammar regarding construct chains (e.g., GKC § 127a–i; *IBHS* § 9.7a), the NIV's and other versions' renderings of these, which ignore the definite article's presence, are incorrect. They obscure the richness and diversity by which the ark is described.

<sup>7179</sup> The priests mentioned in Exod 19:22, 24 may have been non-Levitical priests, since the restriction of the priesthood to the tribe of Levi did not come until later.

<sup>8180</sup> The term is found several times in Deuteronomy; see 17:9, 18; 18:1; 24:8; 27:9.

<sup>9181</sup> See also J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 602–3, where he agrees, seeing this expression as perhaps "another way of referring to 'legitimate priests.' "

to have been more usual for Levites who were not priests to carry the ark.<sup>18102</sup> The priesthood was restricted to Levites (in general) and Aaron's family (specifically) in the Mosaic legislation (Num 25:7–13, esp. vv. 12–13; Deut 18:5). Although all legitimate priests were Levites, not all Levites were priests; their duties were different.<sup>1811312</sup>

The instructions before the people crossed the Jordan continued, this time with God speaking to Joshua (vv. 7–8) and then Joshua speaking again to the people (vv. 9–13). The long build-up to the miraculous stopping of the waters continues.

**3:8** The second part of God's instructions to Joshua is more prosaic than the first: the priests carrying the ark were actually to enter the water and stand there. This anticipates what would happen when they did this: the waters would actually stop flowing.

**3:9–10** With v. 9, the text begins an inexorable movement toward the chapter's climax in vv. 14–17. Joshua assembled the people to hear God's words, and he stated that there would be a specific way that they would know that God was in their midst and that he would drive out the nations. This way is not stated until v. 13, when the "wonderful things" previewed in v. 5 are revealed to be the stopping of the Jordan's flow.

Verse 10 is introduced by a short prepositional phrase: "By this you will know...." <sup>19133</sup> "This" refers to the miraculous sign of the water stoppage in v. 13, which is emphasized by the repeated verbs and the vivid imagery there. God's actions here were for a larger purpose than

---

<sup>10182</sup> The task was normally assigned to the Kohathite branch of the Levites (Num 4:15), but other passages are more general in just mentioning the Levites (e.g., Deut 10:8; 31:25; 1 Chr 15:4–15, esp. v. 15). However, the Levites were not to touch the holy things in preparation, just carry them. The priests were to prepare the holy things for carrying by the Levites: Num 4:5–6, 15.

<sup>11183</sup> The exact nature of the priesthood in all periods in the OT—and its exact relationship to the Levites—is the subject of a vast amount of scholarly discussion. Critical assumptions about the lateness of the priesthood have been a linchpin in the documentary hypothesis, and they formed an important part of J. Wellhausen's theory of an evolutionary development of Israel's religion. See the judicious reviews of the subject by G. J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981), 74–77; W. O. McCready, "Priests and Levites," *ISBE* 3:965–70; D. A. Hubbard, "Priests and Levites," *NBD*, 956–60; and E. H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 262 (on 17:9) and 267 (on 18:1).

<sup>12</sup> David M. Howard Jr., *Joshua*, vol. 5, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 120–121.

<sup>13193</sup> The verb "know" occurs again with a *paragogic nun* (see on v. 7), referring again to the miracle.

just Israel's crossing the Jordan. It was to demonstrate to Israel that the "living God" was among them.

The reference here to the "living God" is most likely intended to contrast Israel's living, powerful God with the "dead," false gods of the seven peoples who are named in the verse. In Hos 1:10 [Hb. 2:1], the same term is used, and the context there is also part of a contrast. There, God had instructed Hosea to name his third child "Not my people" as an ironic reminder to Israel that they had gone astray and were like the pagans around them, not worthy of being called God's people (Hos 1:9). However, a promise of restoration follows (1:10–11 [Hb. 2:1–2]), and to those who would taunt Israel with the name "Not my people," God responds forcefully that the Israelites were in reality "the sons of the living God." Other uses of the term in the Old Testament also denote a contrast, usually between Israel's God and hostile pagan gods or forces.<sup>19144</sup> Here, then, the term "the living God" is used as a polemic against God's enemies, who were also Israel's enemies. It was a forceful reminder to Israel that their God was *not* like the gods of the nations around them, nations whom they were going to displace (v. 10b), but rather he was a powerful and living God, able to effect the type of miracle in view here. And this living God was "among you," literally, "in your midst," affirming the promise of God's presence that he had made to Joshua (see 1:5, 9).

The wordplay of "knowing" (vv. 4, 7) is continued in v. 10. The events that were soon to follow were not just for the purpose of getting the Israelites across the Jordan River. They were to attest to the fact "that the living God is among you"! These wonderful acts were testimonies to God's glorious presence among his people, working on their behalf. This exact wording—"This is how you will know ..."—is found only one other time in the Old Testament, in Num 16:28, where God was authenticating Moses' position as his chosen leader (cp. similarly Exod 7:17). Here, he is doing the same for Joshua.

Seven peoples are listed in v. 10. Twenty-three times in the Old Testament we find such lists, including five times in Joshua (3:10; 9:1; 11:3; 12:8; 24:11). The number and order of the names vary in each list, but seven is used often, probably as a number symbolic of completeness. Twelve peoples occur in all, but a core of seven—the seven mentioned here—comprises the "standard" list.<sup>19155</sup>

---

<sup>14194</sup> The term here, אֱלֹהֵי חַי, "living God," occurs only four times in the OT: in Josh 3:10; Pss 42:2 [Hb. 3]; 84:2 [Hb. 3]; and Hos 1:10 [Hb. 2:1]. The term "my living God" (or "the God of my life" [NIV]) is found in Ps 42:8 [Hb. 9]. In the three Psalms passages, death or estrangement from God lurk in the background, and the "living God" is a source of life for the psalmists. Variations of אֱלֹהֵי חַי are אֱלֹהֵי חַיִּים Kgs 19:4, 16 // Isa 37:4, 17), אֱלֹהֵי חַיִּים (Deut 5:23; 1 Sam 17:26, 36; Jer 10:10; 23:36), and אֱלֹהֵי חַיִּים (Dan 6:20, 26 [Aram 6:21, 27]). In the case of each of these variant forms, the "living God" is contrasted with hostile pagan gods or forces.

<sup>15195</sup> The most detailed study of the lists is E. C. Hostetter, *Nations Mightier and More Numerous: The Biblical View of Palestine's Pre-Israelite Peoples*, BIBAL Dissertation Series 3 (N. Richland Hills, Tex.: BIBAL Press, 1995). See also T. Ishida, "The Structure

In Joshua, these seven nations are listed at 3:10 and 24:11, while six nations are listed in the other three references. The primary way in which the lists are used in the Old Testament is in connection with Israel's possession of the land of Canaan.<sup>19166</sup> These were the peoples whom they were to displace. And the fact that they are commonly listed as separate nations—as opposed to being described simply as “the people who live in the land” (Exod 23:31), or inclusively as “the Canaanites”—shows a contrast between the ethnic divisions among them, as opposed to the national unity that was so important for Israel.<sup>19177</sup> Furthermore, the lists of peoples functioned to help the Israelites define themselves: they were not these wicked, divided nations, but rather one people, God's people.<sup>19188</sup>

The term “Canaanites”<sup>19199</sup> sometimes is an all-inclusive term denoting any people living in Canaan, regardless of their ethnic identity (e.g., Gen 12:6; 36:2–3; Exod 13:11; Ezek 16:3). Often, however, the Canaanites are distinguished from others who lived in Canaan, as they are here (e.g., Josh 7:9; Judg 1:27–29). In this case, they probably are the peoples living near the sea and near the Jordan River (see 5:1, which mentions Canaanites along the coast, and Num 13:29, which mentions them by the sea and near the Jordan).<sup>20200</sup>

The Hittites appear in the Bible primarily in the hill country of Judah (e.g., Hebron: Genesis 23; Beersheba: Gen 26:34; Bethel: Judg 1:22–26; Jerusalem: Ezek 16:3, 45).<sup>20211</sup> Here in Joshua, the reference to them appears to be the same (Josh 11:3 specifically states that they lived in the hill country). As we noted in the comment on 1:4, there was a great Hittite kingdom of the middle and late second millennium B.C. to the north of Israel's lands in northern Syria, and

---

and Historical Implications of the Lists of Pre-Israelite Nations,” *Bib* 60 (1979): 461–90, and Mitchell, *Together in the Land*, 122–33.

<sup>16196</sup> Hostetter, *Nations Mightier and More Numerous*, 141–42.

<sup>17197</sup> See Hostetter (ibid., 143) on this point. See the commentary on 1:13–15 and chap. 22 on the importance of Israel's unity in the Book of Joshua.

<sup>18198</sup> Hostetter, *Nations Mightier and More Numerous*, 143–45.

<sup>19199</sup> All the names in this verse are singular (i.e., “the Canaanite,” “the Hittite,” etc.), but they refer to the groups represented.

<sup>20200</sup> On these people's geographical distribution and the dual use of their name (i.e., all-inclusive and more limited), see Hostetter, *Nations Mightier and More Numerous*, 57–62. Extrabiblically, much is known of the Canaanites (and the Phoenicians, who carried the Canaanite traditions into the first millennium B.C.). See A. R. Millard, “The Canaanites,” in D. J. Wiseman, ed., *Peoples of Old Testament Times* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 29–52; J. Day, “Canaan, Religion of,” *ABD* 1:831–37; K. N. Schoville, “Canaanites and Amorites,” *POTW*, 157–82.

<sup>21201</sup> See Boling, *Joshua*, 122–23.

vestiges of this kingdom appear to be in view in the reference to Solomon's trading partners in 1 Kgs 10:29.<sup>20222</sup>

The next three peoples in the list are relatively obscure.<sup>20233</sup> The Hivites were located in the mountainous region to the north, in what is today Lebanon (Josh 11:3; Judg 3:3). The Perizzites appear to have lived in the forested areas of central Palestine, in the highlands of Samaria (Gen 13:7; Josh 17:15). The Girgashites appear in the Bible only in the lists of peoples. Based on where the other peoples lived, Hostetter suggests that the only area left for the Girgashites was toward the north of Palestine. All three of these peoples are unknown outside the Bible.

Like the term "Canaanite," the term "Amorite" is sometimes used as an all-inclusive term, referring to anyone living in Canaan (see Gen 15:16; 36:2–3; Josh 24:15; Judg 1:34–35; Ezek 16:3). Elsewhere it is a more limited term, referring to areas in the central hill country of Canaan (Num 13:29; Deut 1:7) or to kingdoms east of the Jordan River (Num 21:26; Deut 4:46; Josh 13:10, 21). Here, it probably refers to the people east of the Jordan. Outside the Bible, "Amorites" are known from early texts in Mesopotamia, and there they are "westerners," that is, people coming from the west (from Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine). Later, an "Amorite" kingdom is known, with its capital at Sidon.<sup>20244</sup>

The Jebusites were the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Jerusalem (see Josh 15:8; 18:28). They are the only ones in the list named for a city ("Jebus" was the name of Jerusalem when David captured it [1 Chr 11:4–9]). Outside the Bible, the Jebusites are known from archaeological remains in Jerusalem, but not from literary sources.<sup>20255</sup>

The "standard" list of seven peoples includes several very obscure peoples alongside several more prominent ones, yet the list was selective, since additional peoples are mentioned in some texts. Why were these particular seven chosen? This probably was due in part, if not

---

<sup>22202</sup> For the Hittites' geographical distribution, see Hostetter, *Nations Mightier and More Numerous*, 66–72. For more general introductions to the Hittites, see the works mentioned at 1:4.

<sup>23203</sup> On the Hivites, see Hostetter, *Nations Mightier and More Numerous*, 72–76, and D. W. Baker, "Hivites," *ABD* 3:234–35. On the Perizzites, see Hostetter, *Nations Mightier and More Numerous*, 80–83, and S. A. Reed, "Perizzite," *ABD* 5:231. On the Girgashites, see Hostetter, *Nations Mightier and More Numerous*, 62–66, and D. W. Baker, "Girgashite," *ABD* 2:1028.

<sup>24204</sup> On the Amorites, see Hostetter, *Nations Mightier and More Numerous*, 51–57; M. Liverani, "The Amorites," in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, 100–133; G. E. Mendenhall, "Amorites," *ABD* 1:199–202; Schoville, "Canaanites and Amorites," *POTW*, 157–82.

<sup>25205</sup> On the Jebusites, see Hostetter, *Nations Mightier and More Numerous*, 76–80; R. K. Harrison, "Jebus; Jebusite," *ISBE* 2:973–74; S. A. Reed, "Jebus," *ABD* 3:652–53.

entirely, to the complete geographical picture obtained, since these peoples occupied the lands that the Israelites took.<sup>20266</sup>

**3:11–13** Joshua now focused the Israelites' attention on the ark by using an attention-getting word *hinnēh* ("See!" "Look!" "Behold!"). The ark was to be their guide, and its position at the water's edge would signal the beginning of the miracle. The Hebrew in v. 11 has, literally, "the ark of the covenant, the Lord of all the earth," which all versions correct to read "the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth." However, if the Hebrew is correct as it stands, then the ark is identified all that much more closely with God himself, that is, the ark (or the covenant) is equated with the Lord himself.

Joshua's words in v. 12 about choosing twelve men look ahead, anticipating the actions Israel was to take after the crossing.<sup>20277</sup> God spoke these words to Joshua almost verbatim in 4:2, adding that these men were to take up twelve stones for a memorial (4:3–7). This demonstrates again the slow building up of the story we have already noted: it shows a skilled author at work, who will repeat himself at different points or suspend his story and then resume it, in the interests of weaving an ordered, intricate story. We see this in the portrayal of the priests in this chapter: they are introduced in 3:3, but their role is made clearer in 3:8, and then clearer still in 3:13. We also see it in the repetition of the crossing motif at several points: 3:1, 14, 16, 17; 4:1, 10, 11.<sup>20288</sup>

Finally, in v. 13, the substance of the "amazing things" spoken of in v. 5 is revealed: when the priests carrying the ark stepped into the Jordan, the waters would stop flowing! The entire chapter thus far has been building to this revelation. In reality, probably most Israelites—and most readers—would have guessed long before this what was going to happen. However, the author's presentation of the information draws out the suspense on a literary level and highlights the magnificence of the miracle.

Here the Lord is identified as sovereign over all the earth, although the word for "earth" (*'ereṣ*) can also mean "land"; if this is the intended meaning, it is nevertheless appropriate, since the Lord was not only sovereign over all the earth, but also the entire land of Canaan, which he was in process of giving to Israel.

---

<sup>20266</sup> See Hostetter, *Nations Mightier and More Numerous*, 83, 142–43, on this point and his map on p. 151.

<sup>27207</sup> That it is a slight interruption in the immediate concerns of the story is indicated by the disjunctive particle *wē'attā* ("So, now") that begins the verse. These words thus may not have been spoken in actuality until later, but they are introduced here to anticipate the second part of the story, the memorializing of the crossing.

<sup>28208</sup> Hess (*Joshua*, 103) makes the point well: "Like a film in which the camera switches back and forth between the various scenes of action, the narrative moves back and forth between these three groups [the priests, the twelve men, and the people]." See also Woudstra, *Joshua*, 86. Critical commentators see v. 12's placement as yet another indication of tangled literary sources in this part of Joshua (e.g., Soggin, *Joshua*, 59–60; Nelson, *Joshua*, 55).

The stoppage of the waters is viewed in two ways here, anticipating the further elaboration in vv. 16–17 and in several places in chap. 4: they would be “cut off,” and they would “stand up in a heap.”<sup>29</sup>

These verses are the climax of the chapter—indeed, of all of chaps. 3–4. Here, the narrative slows to a crawl, so that the reader can savor the wonder of the miracle and view it from as many different perspectives as possible. The author, by writing in this way, affirms God’s greatness and power and intervention on his people’s behalf. The point is not so much that the people were able to cross over the Jordan, but the *manner* in which they were able to cross: by a glorious and mighty miracle of God. The immediate purpose of the miracle was obviously to get Israel across the Jordan. However, the larger purpose was—as it is with all miracles—to testify to God’s greatness and faithfulness, both to Israel (v. 10) and to all the peoples of the earth (4:24a), and to stimulate proper worship of him (4:24b).

That we are to be awed by the wonder of the miracle is clear as we read these two chapters, and especially when we reach the climax itself. This is accomplished in several ways: by the many verbs describing the water stoppage in vv. 13 and 16, by the verbs of standing or resting in the Jordan (vv. 8, 13, 15, 17), by the references to high water or dry ground (vv. 15, 17), and by the very syntactical constructions in vv. 14–16. This emphasis is confirmed in chap. 4, where many of the same motifs are repeated: see especially 4:7, 18, 22–23.

**3:14–16** Here finally we read the account of the miracle that has been anticipated from the beginning of the chapter. It is truly a remarkable one: the Jordan River, at flood stage, was completely stopped up when the priests carrying the ark stepped into it, and the people were able to cross over on dry land!

In Hebrew, these verses constitute one long, drawn-out statement about the stopping up of the waters, followed by a short, terse statement about the people’s crossing over. The drawn-out nature of vv. 14–15 especially highlights the suspense and wonder until the powerful statements in v. 16 about the miracle itself. Unfortunately the NIV has obscured this by breaking the passage into four sentences and changing some of the clause order.

A more literal translation of vv. 14–16 would read as follows:<sup>20309</sup>

*And it happened—when the people set out from their tents to cross the Jordan, with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant before them, and when those carrying the ark came as far as the Jordan, and [when] the feet of the priests carrying the ark were dipped into the edge of the waters (now the Jordan overflows all its banks all the days of the harvest)—that the waters coming down from above stood! They rose up [in] one*

---

<sup>29</sup> David M. Howard Jr., [Joshua](#), vol. 5, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 123–129.

<sup>30209</sup> The words in brackets are not in the Hebrew, but they are necessary in making the transition from one language to another. The words in italics constitute the main “story line” of these verses, whereas those not italicized constitute the subordinate clauses containing background material of various types.

heap, a very far distance away, at Adam, the city that is opposite Zarethan,<sup>21310</sup> and the [waters] coming down upon the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea,<sup>21321</sup> were completely cut off. And the people crossed opposite Jericho.”

Two things should be observed here about the syntax, because it is highly unusual and appears to many scholars to be overcomplicated and thus a signal that different literary sources lie behind these verses.<sup>21332</sup> (1) The statements in vv. 14–15 are all in subordinate clauses of some type, which means that the author, having begun his main thought with *and it happened*, leaves us suspended as to what actually happened until v. 16. The same is true for the statement at the end of v. 16, telling of the actual crossing: it is in a subordinate clause, and it is included as a statement of what happened, but clearly the focus is on the miracle, not the crossing. (2)<sup>34</sup>

The river was **at flood stage**—a foreboding sight to the priests and people and a severe test of their faith. Would they hesitate in fear or would they advance in faith, believing that what God had promised (about the water stopping, 3:13) would actually happen?<sup>35</sup>

The commentator was trying to explain a contradiction between this unit, where the Ark-bearers seem to stand near the riverbank, and the next one, where they clearly stand in midstream. How could this have been? Answer: In this first unit, they had entered the water but

---

<sup>31210</sup> The cities were some fifteen to twenty miles upriver from where the Israelites crossed. On their locations, see M. J. Fretz, “Adam (Place),” *ABD* 1:64; H. O. Thompson, “Zarethan,” *ABD* 6:1041–43.

<sup>32211</sup> The reference here is to the Dead Sea. The “Arabah” is part of the great Rift Valley that runs north and south in eastern Africa. In the Bible, it includes the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea, and the depression running southward from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba. See R. K. Harrison, “Arabah,” *ISBE* 1:218–20; Boling, *Joshua*, 170.

<sup>33212</sup> R. Nelson, e.g., sees “the complex, overfull sentence in vv. 14–16” as “undoubtedly the result of a complicated history of composition and redaction” (*Joshua*, 55). Other scholars are more sensitive to the dramatic unfolding of the narrative. See, e.g., Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 91–110 (on all of 3:1–5:1); Winther-Nielsen, *Functional Discourse Grammar of Joshua*, 176–79 (on 3:14–17).

<sup>34</sup> David M. Howard Jr., *Joshua*, vol. 5, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 129–130.

<sup>35</sup> Donald K. Campbell, “Joshua,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 335.

not the river channel. They could do this because the river was in flood. In fact, during most of the year, the Jordan can easily be forded (Judg 3:28; 8:4; 1 Sam 13:7; 2 Sam 17:24)

*The Jordan overflows its banks.* The overflow is associated with late winter to early spring, when the river is at its fullest, swollen by the long winter rains first and later by the melting of snows in the Anti-Lebanon range.

*harvest.* Early summer is when the first crops come in and the river is still high. LX<sup>36</sup>X secondarily specifies “wheat harvest.”

The scribe who contributed this harmonizing parenthesis understood that the miracle began when they stepped into the floodwaters, before entering the riverbed proper<sup>37</sup>

*stand still.* The verb is *‘md*, used in a significant pattern: introduced by the officers (v 4, “Hold position!”), used by Yahweh (v 8), repeated by Joshua (v 13, “stand up”), and again by the narrator (v 16).<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup>LXX The Septuagint

<sup>37</sup> Robert G. Boling and G. Ernest Wright, [\*Joshua: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary\*](#), vol. 6, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 168.

<sup>38</sup> Robert G. Boling and G. Ernest Wright, [\*Joshua: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary\*](#), vol. 6, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 164.