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## FACING CHANGE

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### STUDY NOTES FOR CARE GROUPS – JOSHUA 3

May 25, 2009

#### *Introduction and Background*

Can you think back and remember a day you waited for a long time with great anticipation and excitement? Can you imagine the anticipation and excitement the children of Israel faced as they stood before the River Jordan the evening before they were to cross over into the land?

The earlier generation had failed to enter because of unbelief and the new generation had waited a long time, for some it was close to forty years. Joshua and Caleb, who were now about eighty years old, had waited even longer. According to the promise to the Patriarchs, Jewish anticipation went back some five hundred years. But now, Joshua tells the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you" (3:5).

As we look at Joshua 3, you see that it can easily be divided into 3 sections:

#### *1. Initial Instructions. 3:1-6*

Aside from the miraculous way the river was crossed, the most important feature of this chapter is the Ark of the Covenant. Its prominence is stressed in the number of times it is mentioned in chapter 3.

What's so important about the Ark? It represented the person and promises of God. It pointed to the fact that as the people of Israel set out to cross the Jordan, invade, and possess the land, they must do so not in their own strength, but in God's for it was God Himself who was going before them as their source of victory.

And such is the case with all of life. As Paul cried out when contemplating the challenges and trials of ministry, "And who is adequate for these things?" But he then answered his own question with these words: "And such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God" (2 Cor. 3:4-5).

In verse 5, Joshua commands the people to consecrate themselves in view of the wonders God would work among them on the next day. But what does the word "consecrate" mean?

"Consecrate" is the Hebrew *qadash* and it may mean, "be hallowed, set apart, consecrated" or "consecrate, set apart, prepare, dedicate." But here it is in the *hithpael* stem which is reflexive and means, "consecrate yourselves, set yourselves apart, prepare yourselves." This stem points out **personal responsibility**. There is a personal responsibility for each of us to consecrate our lives.

## *2. Additional Instructions 3:7-13*

Our tendency is to exalt ourselves, but Joshua, in reporting God's communication to him, said nothing about this promise of being exalted. Rather, when reporting the words of God to Israel, he focused their attention on the fact that it was the living God who was among them and that it was He and He alone who would dispossess the enemies of the land

Since it was the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant, and since it was the ark that represented God's person and power, they alone were to take the Ark to the edge of the water and stand still in the water. What do we gather from this? It reminds us of our part in the plan of God. We must learn to step out in faith and obedience to the principles and promises of Scripture.

The focus in verse 9 is on hearing the "words of the Lord your God." In this we see the concept of Romans 10:17, "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ." What can we learn from this for leadership? The authority of leaders among God's people needs to be the Scripture rather than their personality, charisma, or whatever happens to appeal to people.

## *3. The Miraculous Crossing 4: 14-17*

After breaking camp, as instructed, the priests, carrying the Ark of the Covenant, led the way and walked to the Jordan which was swollen over its banks. This must have been a fearful sight, but resting in the presence of the living God they stepped into the waters. Immediately, a miracle occurred.

Considering all the factors involved it seems best to view this occurrence as a special act of God brought about in a way unknown to man. Many supernatural elements were brought together: (1) The event came to pass as predicted (3:13, 15). (2) The timing was exact (v. 15). (3) The event took place when the river was at flood stage (v. 15). (4) The wall of water was held in place for many hours, possibly an entire day (v. 16). (5) The soft, wet river bottom became dry at once (v. 17). (6) The water returned immediately as soon as the people had crossed over and the priests came up out of the river (4:18).

As one studies this third chapter and marvels at the miraculous work of God displayed here, there is an important principle that should not be missed. Crossing the Jordan at flood stage with two million people had several immediate results: God was magnified, Joshua was exalted (3:5), the people were surely energized and motivated, and the people of the land, the Canaanites, were terrorized (cf. 1:9; 5:1). God was giving them the land.

For believers today, crossing the Jordan represents passing from one level of the Christian life to another. It is a picture of entering into spiritual warfare to claim what God has promised. This should mean the end of a life lived by human effort and the beginning of a life of faith and obedience.

***Verses that stand out and you could focus on for discussion and meditation.***

Joshua 3:4 *Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.*

Joshua 3:5 *Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."*

Joshua 3:7 *And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses.*

Joshua 3:9 *Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. 10 This is how you will know that the living God is among you----*

Joshua 3:17 *The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.*

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#### APPLICATION QUESTIONS

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What lessons can we learn about guidance for our lives?

How do we accept change in our own lives and in the life of GBC?

What can we learn from Joshua 3 as we look at the next 50 years?

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#### ***Resources for these notes.***

... *The People's Bible Commentary*

... *"Studies in the Life of Joshua" by J. Hampton Keathley*