

Crossing the Jordan (Joshua 3:1-4:24 and Romans 6:1-24) 26-Apr-2026

Joshua 3:1-4:24

Crossing the Jordan

3 Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. **2** After three days the officers went throughout the camp, **3** giving orders to the people: “When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. **4** Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about two thousand cubits between you and the ark; do not go near it.”

5 Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.”

6 Joshua said to the priests, “Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people.” So they took it up and went ahead of them.

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. **8** Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: ‘When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river.’”

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 and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. **11** See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. **12** Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. **13** And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap.”

14 So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. **15** Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water’s edge, **16** the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. **17** The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of

the Lord stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

4 When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, ²“Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, ³and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.”

⁴So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, ⁵and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, ⁶to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ ⁷ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”

⁸So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the Lord had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down. ⁹Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day. ¹⁰Now the priests who carried the ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything the Lord had commanded Joshua was done by the people, just as Moses had directed Joshua. The people hurried over, ¹¹and as soon as all of them had crossed, the ark of the Lord and the priests came to the other side while the people watched. ¹²The men of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over, ready for battle, in front of the Israelites, as Moses had directed them. ¹³About forty thousand armed for battle crossed over before the Lord to the plains of Jericho for war.

¹⁴That day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him all the days of his life, just as they had stood in awe of Moses.

¹⁵Then the Lord said to Joshua, ¹⁶“Command the priests carrying the ark of the covenant law to come up out of the Jordan.”

¹⁷So Joshua commanded the priests, “Come up out of the Jordan.”

¹⁸ And the priests came up out of the river carrying the ark of the covenant of the Lord. No sooner had they set their feet on the dry ground than the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and ran at flood stage as before.

¹⁹ On the tenth day of the first month the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho. ²⁰ And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. ²¹ He said to the Israelites, "In the future when your descendants ask their parents, 'What do these stones mean?' ²² tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.' ²³ For the Lord your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The Lord your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. ²⁴ He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God."

Romans 6:1-4

Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ

6 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

There are **Bibles** in front of you

And a sermon **outline**

Please have your **Bibles opened** up at **Joshua chapter 3**.

Let me pray first...

Context

Just to get the **context** of where we are up to

[Slide-Context]

Moses – with God's help in sending 10 plagues - had led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt

They crossed the Red Sea – went into the wilderness – and headed for the land God had promised

God gave Moses the **10 commandments** for the people to obey.

The **Israelites rebelled and disobeyed God so much** – their **journey lasted 40 years instead of a few weeks.**

Moses **brought them to the River Jordan east of the Promised Land** and then

Moses died – and his **leadership transferred to Joshua.**

Joshua and the Israelites are now on the brink of crossing the river Jordan

As we hit chapter 3...

[Slide-1st point]

1st point this morning – **Preparing to Cross** – verses 1 to 6

Preparing to Cross (3:1-6)

Before they can cross the River Jordan – the Israelites must be properly prepared

V3 – They must watch the Levite priests carrying the **Ark of the Covenant**

[Slide-Ark of the Covenant]



The **Ark of the Covenant** contained the 10 commandments, Aaron's staff and a bowl of manna (Hebrews 9:4)

On top of the Ark was a golden lid or cover called the mercy seat [Exodus 25]
Two cherubim faced each other on the lid, and it symbolized the place where God's presence dwelt among His people.

Most importantly, once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would sprinkle animal blood on the mercy seat to atone for the sins of Israel. So the mercy seat was both:

- a **place of God's presence**, and
- a **place of atonement and forgiveness**

The idea is powerful: the holy God meets sinful people not in judgment, but through sacrifice for sin.

V4 – Joshua told the people they had to follow the **Ark of the Covenant** at a distance of 2000 cubits which is 3000 ft or 900m or 1000 yards

Why?

Four reasons:

1. To **honour God's holiness** – God is holy – the people are not
2. So **everyone can see where to follow** – we know from Numbers 1 and 26 there were 600,000 Israelite men – so if we add women and children – it's well over a million people
3. To emphasize **God is leading them**
4. A reminder **to trust God and follow** without being presumptuous and without trying to control things themselves and rush ahead

V5 – they had to **consecrate** themselves – which means preparing oneself to be devoted to God. For the Israelites it involved **outward preparation** – washing themselves, their clothes and abstaining from certain activities (as in Exodus 19) and it also involved **inward preparation** - turning away from sin, renewing obedience to God, and focusing their hearts on God.

For us as we gather in worship or as we spend time with God – because we belong to Christ, we don't prepare to earn God's presence—but we do prepare to respond to God's presence properly. We turn from our sin, refocus our hearts towards God, and have a mindset that expects God to act.

So the people are prepared – and v6 – Joshua tells the priests to take up the **Ark of the Covenant** and pass on ahead of the people

[Slide-The Exaltation of God's Servant]

2nd point – we see – **the Exaltation of God's Servant** – **Joshua** – verses 7 to 9

The Exaltation of God's Servant (3:7-9)

Here in verse 7, God promises to exalt Joshua

Exalt means to raise someone to the highest rank and give them the highest praise and glory

God promises to exalt Joshua so the people will recognize that God is truly with Joshua, just as He was with Moses. In this way God publicly confirms Joshua as His chosen leader so the people will trust and follow him.

For us - God raises up leaders of nations and churches today. God installs and uninstalls leaders as He sees fit.

God exalted Joshua so Israel would know He was with him. In a far greater way, God has exalted His Son, Jesus- through His birth, His life, His teaching, His death, resurrection and ascension—so we can be absolutely certain Jesus is the true and ultimate leader we must trust and follow.

With that confirmation from God

V8 – Joshua tells the priests carrying the **Ark of the Covenant** “*When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river*”

And at the same time – v9 – Joshua tells the people to listen to God’s Words...

We should point out at this stage – that the river Jordan is in flood stage - which we get from v15

[Slide-Jordan]



It’s impossible for a million people to cross this raging river!

Would we like to be the priests stepping in to that river and standing in the middle of it?

[Slide-3rd point]

Which brings us to the 3rd point – **God Does the Impossible** – verses 10 to 17

God does the Impossible (3:10-17)

Not only do they have the impossible task of crossing the River Jordan –

But v10 – there are **seven hostile and idolatrous nations** occupying the land - the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites.

Often the Bible uses the **number seven** as God's number of **completion**. The

Land is **completely** occupied - however - God promises **He** will drive these nations out!

There is a certain logic behind this promise

If God can tame a raging river – and drive out hostile nations from the land – it means He can not only get the Israelites into the land – but also give them the land to occupy.

This is the same God-logic – the Apostle Paul uses in **Romans 8:31-32**

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

(pause)

Back to Joshua...

Joshua tells the people what will happen

The priests and **Ark of the Covenant** will go ahead of them (v11)

They are to choose 12 men – one from each tribe (v12) – they will be needed later for a special task.

And the priests are to carry the ark to the river's edge and as soon as they set foot in the Jordan, the waters flowing will be cut off and stand in a heap (v13)

I don't know about you – but I'd be scared to dip my foot in this raging river!

The priests were required to **walk by faith – not by sight** (2 Corinthians 5:7)

Are we not to do the same?

God requires obedience before the miracle!

Trusting God often means stepping into the impossible first!

(pause)

Praise God – what He said would happen – happened.

V16 -the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called **Adam**.

[Slide-Crossing]



The place **Adam** – where the water piled up is over 20km away from where the priests stepped into the water.

This means the people didn't have to cross in single file but could spread out along the river, to cross the dry river bed.

V17 tells us the priests carrying the ark stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all the Israelites passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

Whether the people actually maintained the 2,000-cubit distance or not, we're not told—but there was certainly plenty of room for them to do so.

The key point is that the **Ark of the Covenant** points us forward to **the cross of Jesus Christ**. Just as Israel looked to the Ark of the Covenant as the means by which God brought them safely through the waters, so we look to the **cross** as the means of our salvation.

But it's not enough just to see the cross—we must personally acknowledge that the cross of Christ is the only way we are saved. In the same way, Israel had to actively follow what God had provided for their rescue.

Remember What God Has Done (4:1-24)

[Slide-4th point]

Which brings us to our 4th point – **Remember What God Has Done** – that's Joshua chapter 4

This crossing of the Jordan shows us a few things about God:

- He is **all-powerful** (He even controls nature)
- He is **faithful** (He always keeps His promises)
- He is **ever-present** (He goes with His people)
- He is **Holy** (He requires our reverence and obedience)

In Joshua chapter 4...

There are **two distinct memorials**

The **first memorial** is in verse 9

[Stones-River]

Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day.

They would not be visible once the water started flowing again!

But they **marked the spot where God performed the miracle.**

The **second memorial** is in verse 20

[Stones-Gilgal]

Joshua erected - at the camp at Gilgal - the twelve stones - that the 12 men who were chosen in 3:12 - had taken out of the Jordan.

These stones were a visible and permanent memorial - used for teaching future generations

You can imagine 10 years' after this crossing of the Jordan - an Israelite Dad taking his six-year-old for a walk in Gilgal National Park – and the six-year-old asks **“Hey Dad, what are these stones for?”** And the Dad can explain all about the miraculous power of the One True God!

Memorials teach the next generation!

(pause)

Yesterday was **ANZAC Day**

[Slide-Anzac]

Why do we remember ANZAC Day?

LEST WE FORGET!

Lest we forget the sacrifice the Australian and NZ diggers made – so we have the freedom and peace we enjoy in our nation today!

Remembering is important

Remembering what God has done is also super important.

Why?

- Because - we are often very forgetful people
- Because - remembering often fuels our faith and our obedience
- And it helps us pass on our faith to the next generation
- And it overcomes any doubts we have in future trials, when we remember what God did for us in the past

The pattern of remembrance that God established—and the Israelites enacted—at the Jordan continues in Jesus' Church.

[Slide-Birth]

- At Christmas - we remember **Jesus' miraculous birth through the Virgin Mary** – remembering that God is with us in human flesh

[Slide-Cross]

- At Easter - we remember the **Cross of Jesus** – His death for the forgiveness of sins

[Slide-Tomb]

- At Easter – we also remember **the empty tomb** – to show Jesus has victory over the punishment of sin – which is death – and He offers all who believe in Him – eternal life

[Lord's Supper]

- When we celebrate the **Lord's Supper** – we have the bread to remember His body broken for us – and we have the juice to remember His blood poured out for us!

Why do we remember these things?

Well – Lest we ever forget God's love, grace and mercy to us sinners, through Jesus' sacrifice!

What Impossible "River Jordans" Do We Have to Cross?

Our fifth point – **What Impossible "River Jordans" Do We Have to Cross?**

(pause)

Perhaps you're **full of grieve over the passing of a loved one** – and it seems impossible your life will ever be the same again!

Perhaps you or a loved one is **facing a huge health crisis** – the treatment is not working – or there's not even a clear diagnosis yet – or the prognosis is awful and the course of treatment is arduous – how will you or your loved one ever cross this river?

Perhaps you're facing a **financial crisis** – and there's no sign of a solution – all doors are closed – it seems!

Perhaps **relationships in your family are broken** – and seem quite unfixable to you – there are stubborn hard hearts that are impenetrable!

Perhaps you've just been **praying for a loved one who's gone down the wrong path** – like the Prodigal Son – and there's no sign of them getting on the right path again!

As Israel stood before the River Jordan, the instruction was not **'be brave'**—it was **'watch the Ark of the Covenant.'**

Because the way forward would only open up wherever God went first.

And that's the same for us. We don't get through our sin, our suffering, our trials, or even our death by our own strength, but by looking to Jesus—the true ark—who goes before us, stands in the waters, and makes a way for us!

So instead of striving harder in our “River Jordans” hear the words of Jesus:

²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

We Have a Greater Crossing (Romans 6:1-4)

Our **Sixth point** – **We Have a Greater Crossing**

[Slide-6th point]

In Joshua, the Israelites pass through the Jordan:

- their old life in the wilderness is behind them
- a new life in the Promised Land begins

But that crossing points forward to **a greater crossing**.

Our NT reading from **Romans 6:1-4** tells us that in Jesus:

- we are **buried with Him**
- our old self is **put to death**
- we are **raised to walk in a new life**

So the **River Jordan** becomes **a picture of baptism**:

- passing through the waters = **death to our old life**
- coming out the other side = **new life in Christ Jesus**

Israel crossed the Jordan and left the wilderness behind.

But in Jesus, we experience the greater crossing.

Through His death and resurrection, our old life is buried, and we are raised to new life.

This is not just a fresh start—we are brought into **a new life** with Him, and we begin the journey toward the true Promised Land of Heaven

So we don't look to our strength—we look to Christ, who has gone before us, brought us through the waters, and leads us into life.

Conclusion/A Bridge to Life (John 5:24)

One final point – we have **a Bridge to Life!**

God didn't make the Israelites build a bridge across the Jordan—He made a way straight through it. The **Ark of the Covenant** stood in the river, and because of

it, the people crossed safely. In that sense, the ark did exactly what a bridge does: it provided the way from one side to the other.

[Slide-John 5:24]

Jesus speaks in similar terms in **John 5:24**:

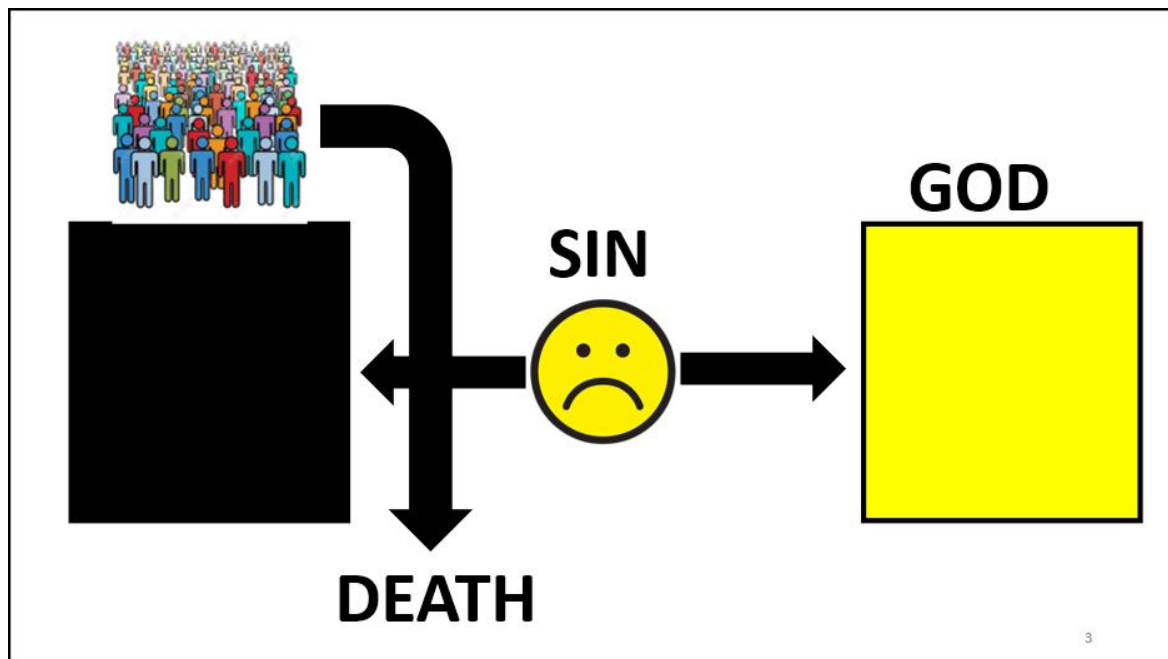
“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”

Jesus is the true and greater **“bridge”**—not just over a river, but from **death to life**. Through Him, we don’t face judgment; we are brought safely across into eternal life.

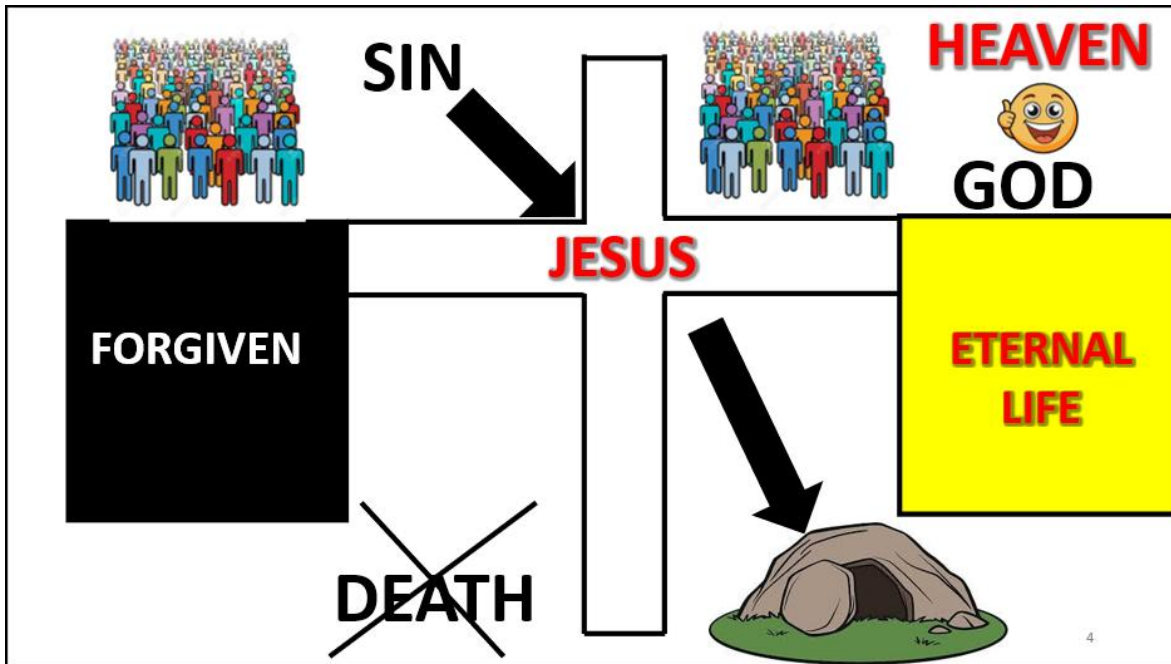
This is a simple and powerful way to explain the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus!

You could perhaps use something like this diagram to tell people what Jesus has done for you...

[Slide-sin and death]



[Slide-Forgiveness and Eternal Life]



Let's pray...

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the way You led Joshua and the Israelites across the Jordan, just as You lead us in our lives. Thank You for reminding us that You go before us, making a way even when the path seems impossible. Lord, help us to trust You more fully, just as the Israelites had to trust in Your promise. May we remember the lessons of the twelve stones—reminders of Your faithfulness—and share Your mighty works with those around us. Strengthen our faith, Father, so that we will follow You with courage, obeying Your commands even when the journey is challenging. Please let Your Word take root in our hearts and guide our steps every day. We pray this in the name Jesus. Amen.