

# Baptized into knowing God

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by David Schrock

Joshua 3–4 is about Israel crossing the Jordan River and entering the Promised Land, which is to say it is about a baptism into and with Joshua. Seeing that “baptism,” however, will take a little cross-referencing and you can read about 10 things in Joshua 3–4 that help us get there in [Pastor David's blog](#). Perhaps the two most important points for us to see revolve around the ark of the covenant and a focus on knowing God.

1. The ark of the covenant is visible throughout the two chapters.

If Joshua 3–4 center on the river crossing and twelve stones, the content of these two chapters also focuses on the ark of the covenant. Starting with Joshua 3:2, the reader is called to watch for this piece of tabernacle furniture to go before the people.

Described in Exodus 25:10–22, this wooden box—rectangular in shape, plated with gold, and covered with God’s mercy seat—represents the place where God dwells. Later in the Old Testament, it will be called God’s “footstool” (1 Chron. 28:2). And here attention is given to the ark because it was the symbol of God’s presence leading the nation into the Promised Land.

Significantly, the people of Israel are called to “see” the ark being carried before them (3:2). From this verse forward the ark will be mentioned another 13 times. For the reader, like the Israelites waiting to cross the Jordan, paying careful attention to the ark will help us understand what is happening in these two chapters. Here’s a short survey of what the chapters say about the ark.

- The Ark of the covenant (of the Lord) (3:3, 6 [2x], 8, 11, 14, 17; 4:7, 9, 18) represents the special covenant relationship with Israel. Cf. “The ark” in 3:15 (2x); 4:10 and “the ark of the Lord” (3:13; 4:5, 11).
- The ark of the testimony (4:16) recalls the testimony God put inside the ark (Exod. 25:16). Could this testimony be the memorial written by God about Joshua in Exodus 17:14?
- The Lord of the ark is the Lord of all the earth (3:11)—i.e., he has authority to displace the Canaanites and give the land to Israel
- The ark will be carried by the Levitical priests. (3:3, 6, 13, etc.)
- The ark will lead the people and when it enters the water (carried by the priests), it will cause the waters to stop (3:8, 14–17).
- When Israel sees the ark, they are to set out from their place and follow it. (3:3)
- All the people will walk *before* the Ark as they went through the waters (4:5). In this way, they were in the Jordan with the Lord as they walked across the riverbed.
- Joshua set up a memorial in the place where the ark of the covenant stood (carried by the priests) in the Jordan River (4:9).

All in all, the ark plays a critical role in this story. And importantly, it stands in for the presence of God. In other words, we should not miss the symbolic connection between this piece of furniture and the covenant Lord whom it represents. To say that the ark was in the riverbed with Israel is to say God was with them. And thus, the miracle of the parted river comes not from some "secret power" in the ark, but in the presence of the God whom the ark symbolized.

2. The point of Joshua 3–4 is to *know* Yahweh and his power.

Joshua 3–4 also indicates that all the actions of God (and Joshua, the priests, and the twelve men) are for the purpose of knowing God and making him known. This is first stated in Joshua 3:10,

*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.

In this verse, Yahweh tells Joshua that Israel will know God is *with* them and *for* them in the upcoming battles in the land because of the way God brings Israel into the land. As Dale Ralph Davis observes,

*The object of this text ("You shall know that the living God is among you") then is to impress us with the adequacy of God, to grill into us that God is not merely a three-letter word of our Christian jargon, not merely the honorary leader of our club, but is the living God who works and intervenes and comes and saves and rescues and counsels his people in all their perplexities. He is indeed 'the Lord of all the earth' (vv. 11, 13), not a mere Little League deity. So we must renounce our tendency to 'punify' God, to carve him down to our stature and limit him to our possibilities. (Joshua, 36)*

Indeed, the goal of these two chapters is not merely to get Israel into the land, but also to give them confidence in God for what they will do in the land—namely, go to war with more than 30 armies (see ch. 12).

While we may not be going to war to enter the land, we too need to know God so that we have confidence in his promises to us through our faith in Christ. Joshua 3 and 4 help to point us to the New Covenant found in Christ and the eternal life found in knowing God.

To learn about the other points and further reflection, visit [Pastor David's blog](#).