

Joshua 3:9–17 — The Living God Is Among You

*Hear His Words, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Jordan Cut Off Before the
Soles of the Priests' Feet*

Scripture Reading: Joshua 3:9–17

“And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the LORD your God.

And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites.

Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan.

And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people... that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan... and the people passed over right against Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground.”

Come Hither and Hear

Verse 9 stands almost as a statement of general principle: “Come hither, and hear the words of the Lord your God.” To hear his word is more than sounds entering the ear. It means that his words enter the heart, are understood, accepted, and

bowed to. In a world drowning in competing voices and contradictory opinions, where thoughtful people throw up their hands and say no one can know anything for certain, here is a summons to that other kind of knowledge — the knowledge that comes from God speaking and the soul receiving what he says.

Hearing his word is a necessity before the crossing. It was needed before they took a single step into the Jordan. All the promise of what lay before them, all the power of God about to be displayed, depended first on hearing what God said. That order is important: hearing precedes seeing, faith precedes sight, and God's word is the foundation upon which every subsequent act of trust rests.

Hereby Ye Shall Know That the Living God Is Among You

Verse 10 begins with a word that carries great weight: know. Not guess, not suppose, not hope — know. “Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you.” This is the exclusive claim of the one true God, set against all the dead idols of the surrounding nations. To stand up in the midst of a world full of other peoples and their gods and say, the living God is among us, carries the implicit declaration that all those others are dead. That is what the word living asserts.

The 20th century documented something remarkable: major strands of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish leadership each gave up, one by one, the exclusive claims of the living God. They quietly removed the assertion that there is only one way, only one Saviour, only one Lord. They converged on a common point of retreat. And the thing they all abandoned was precisely what our verse asserts: the exclusive claims of the living God, and the knowledge of it. That retreat did not change the fact. The living God is the living God whether acknowledged or not.

The second half of the verse — that he will without fail drive out the seven nations — was not fully realized in Israel's history. Judges 1 and 2 show that they did not complete the work. But this is true of many of God's promises to Israel: man has been given opportunity, there has been failure, and the full

realization awaits the future manifestation of Christ. He makes good on everything wherein man has failed. The promise stands because the covenant stands, and the ark is the ark of the covenant — God's side of it has never failed.

The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of All the Earth

The ark is called the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth. That title, Lord of all the earth, is more than a statement of divine ownership. It speaks to the character of what is about to happen: this is not merely Israel's God doing something for Israel. It is the Lord of all the earth acting within his own dominion. The earth is the Lord's and its fullness. He gives to whom he will and takes from whom he will. The seven nations going out and Israel going in are not a tribal dispute but an act of the sovereign Lord of the earth exercising his proprietary rights over what is his.

The Ark of the Covenant: God's side of the covenant has never failed. People may fail their side, but the covenant retains its integrity. The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him, and he will show them his covenant — meaning he will show them his faithfulness to it. The ark going over before the people is the visible pledge of that faithfulness.

The Soles of the Priests' Feet

The moment of crossing is precise: as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark rested in the waters of Jordan, the waters stood in a heap very far from the city Adam. Not when the ark itself was dipped; not when the priests stepped in up to their waists. The soles of the feet. The feet of those who bore the one who spoke typologically of Christ. That was enough. The finished work of Christ, represented by the ark they carried, was sufficient — at the first contact with the river of death, the power of death was stopped.

The heap of waters stood very far from the city Adam. This is an unusual way to mark a location — almost always a landmark is described by what it is near, not how far it is from something else. Here the distance is the point: the judgment that should have overwhelmed the people was removed far away, to Adam. All the waves and billows of judgment flowed over Christ — he bore them fully — so that they did not flow over his people. The vicarious substitution is in the soles of the feet, and the heap standing at Adam.

The priests stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground. Not some. All. The whole company passed over clean. It was not a haphazard or partial thing. God had in view a complete company, and through the death of Christ that complete company passed through. Every individual removed from their tent — not carried by the family, not swept along by the crowd, but each one individually making the passage. Family religion is not sufficient; each must personally remove from their tent.

Come hither and hear the words of the LORD your God. Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you.