

## Focus on Joshua 3:7–17

### WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Carol J. Dempsey

After the death of Moses, his young assistant, Joshua, becomes the leader of the Israelite people, and through his efforts, the Israelites enter Canaan, the promised land. The crossing of the Jordan River is a pivotal event, as important as the Israelites’ crossing of the Red Sea (Exod. 14), which symbolized the Israelites’ leaving a settled experience of oppression in Egypt, to become wanderers sustained by God and living under divine promise. The crossing over the Jordan River takes the people out of the wilderness, completes their initial formation as God’s people, and symbolizes a move toward unity, stability, permanence, and well-being.

### WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Eleazar S. Fernandez

Central to our lectionary reading is the tradition of a God who makes “a way out of no way.” When all possible ways are closed, the God who has been with the people makes a way out of no way. In God there is hope for deliverance. To use a religious idiom of the black church in North America: “God ain’t finished with us yet!” History is not closed; God is not yet finished with history. The Red Seas and Jordan Rivers of history are not barriers to God’s purpose. In God and with God, the people will overcome.

### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,”

Shawnthea Monroe

As they fled from the Egyptian army, the people might have missed the theological significance of crossing the Red Sea, but no one could mistake the crossing of the Jordan for anything other than a demonstration of God’s mighty power. The second event calls to mind the first event, clarifying their understanding of who they are, and who God is. It is this understanding that enables and equips the Israelites to conquer and occupy the land. The same reverence and awe the Israelites felt crossing the Jordan should be present in our worship today. After all, we worship the same living God.

### NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,”

Michael E. Williams

The priests then carry the ark into the middle of the river (on dry riverbed, the narrator adds) and hold it there until all the people have passed across the last geographical barrier into the land of promise. There is no leap of faith here. Rather, trusting God’s promise, the priests step into the water, and example allows the people to trust that the waters will remain heaped up until they too can make it across safely. Note that the waters do not stop flowing until the priests are willing to enter the water. While God takes the initiative, sometimes we have to take a step of faith before we can receive the goodness of God’s dream for us.

## Setting the Scene

### Joshua and Matthew

A reading from the book of Joshua might seem to interrupt recent focus texts from the Gospel of Matthew. Ironically, though, Joshua and Matthew share intriguing roots. The book of Joshua narrates the story of the leader who had taken over the role after Moses died. Scholars have long noted that Matthew several times presents Jesus as a “new” Moses: who finds deliverance as an infant from a tyrannical ruler (Exodus 1:22–2:10, Matthew 2:13–20); who goes up a mountain to receive teachings to guide the community (Exodus 19:20–20:17, Matthew 5–7). Additionally, scholars such as Walter Brueggemann have argued that the imagery and promissory role of land in the Old Testament closely parallels the imagery and promissory role of “kingdom” in the New Testament. Joshua narrates Israel’s entry into the land. Likewise, Matthew’s Gospel more than any other Gospel emphasizes Jesus’ teachings regarding God’s kingdom or sovereign realm.

### Joshua and Waters



Ask the fourth-grade Sunday school class, “Who fought the battle of Jericho?” and they will answer without hesitation: “Joshua!” They might tell you how Joshua marched his army around the city for six days and how on the seventh day the people blew trumpets and gave a mighty cry, and “the walls came a-tumblin’ down.” If you ask those same children, “How did Joshua cross the Jordan?” you will get no response at all. That is the

challenge with this passage from Joshua: the miraculous crossing of the Jordan is totally eclipsed by the fall of Jericho in chapter 6.

Both events demonstrate the power of the living God, but for my money, mastering the waters of the Jordan is far more awe-inspiring than destroying the fortifications of Jericho. In the Hebrew Scriptures, water represents chaos (Genesis 1:2) and God’s judgment on humankind (Genesis 6). Water has the power to bless as well as to curse. . . . This is not the first time the Israelites have crossed a body of water. When Moses led the people through the Red Sea, they began the crossing as slaves and emerged as free people. When Joshua leads the Israelites through the Jordan, they cross as nomadic tribes and emerge as a settled nation. More than that, these two water crossings act as bookends, bracketing God’s promise to free the people and bring them into a land “flowing with milk and honey.” God’s promise is fulfilled in their passing through dangerous waters, proving that God, who alone has power over the chaos of the water, has done this great thing.

—Excerpted from Shawnthea Monroe, *Feasting on the Word, Year A Complete Semicontinuous, Proper 26* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 1–2