

Group Study Outline

You will need to think carefully about how to cover 53 verses in a single study. It takes about 8-9 mins to read it all aloud. This may be a week for some Bible Storying. Or you could select some highlights for a more concentrated study. This Study Outline suggests the format of reading a chunk and then asking some questions on that, before continuing.

LAUNCH QUESTION

Read the following and ask people: why do we find it hard to remember things?

You walk into the kitchen with purpose, then stand in the doorway wondering what you went in there to do. Add to your grocery list? Look for your keys? Get a glass of water? Who knows? Your mind is completely blank.

"Though we jokingly refer to these as 'senior moments,' they happen to everyone - from the very young to the very old," says Dr Adam Gazzaley, from the University of California, who has spent years researching memory issues. "Your brain works as a series of networks, with different areas communicating with each other at all times," he says. "When you're trying to remember something, your brain establishes a new network. Memory glitches occur when there's a break in that network."

What causes the break? Interference, which impairs your ability to focus. Interference can be anything from your phone ringing to background chatter at a restaurant to your mind wandering. "We've found that when a person is exposed to interference, their ability to recall info, even over very short periods of time, declines significantly."

QUESTIONS

Let's be clear on the story so far. Tell it – briefly (!) – from Gen 12:7.

READ Joshua 1:1-2 as a conclusion to that context-setting.

READ Joshua 3:1-17

What would be the effect on Israel of this three-day delay?

Why would God choose that Israel crosses the River at this time of year (15)?

What are 'the wonders' that Israel are to watch from half a mile's distance?

there are several answers to this, so spend time thinking this through ...

What exactly can Israel have confidence about for their future? and why?

READ Joshua 4:1-10a

Tell the story of the priests, the ark, the people and the stones!

What are the stones for?

READ 4:19-24 ... Role-play the conversation between a child and their father.

Why is it important for us to remember?

Why do we need visual reminders? how are these 12 stones like communion?

READ Exod 12:3, 6. So, what is the significance of the date in Josh 4:19?

READ Joshua 4:10b-5:1

How has God fulfilled 3:7 and exalted Joshua? And what does this mean?

Who knows what by this point in the story?!

READ Joshua 5:2-12

For what reasons does Israel delay conquest: why does circumcision matter?

What is the reproach that the Lord rolled away (9)?

Look again at v 11-12. Why are we being told about what they ate?!

THINKING IT THROUGH

How will remembering the past help us to have confidence for the future?

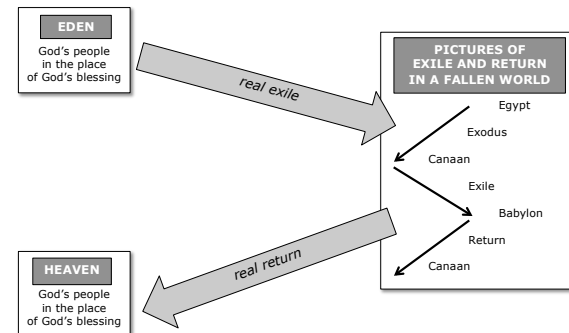
What do we need to 'remember'? Why? Why is it dangerous to forget?

What 'interference' (cf *Launching Question*) endangers Christian remembering?

Joshua 3:1-5:12



The Big Story that the Bible tells is all about **exile** and **return**. Ever since the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, we remain in **exile** from the place of God's blessing ... and that will never be recovered until we **return** to the new heaven and earth. The Bible gives us lots of pictures of mini-exiles and mini-returns, but they remain pictures. Of course it was awful for Israel to be far from their home, enslaved in Egypt, but it was never as bad as all humanity enslaved to sin. And similarly, however good it was to return from exile in Babylon right at the end of the OT, it never quite lived up to the hype of (eg) Is 65:17f.



That's why every believer is like Abraham (Heb 11:8-10, 13-16): even when he was in the land, he didn't think that that land was the full extent of the land God had promised him: he (and us) desire 'a better country, that is, a heavenly one' and we 'groan' now until we can return there (Rom 8:18-25).

Joshua at a glance

The book of Joshua tells the story of a significant 'mini-return': God had shown Abraham the land where his descendants could enjoy prosperity. Before then, they would have to leave to go and be slaves in Egypt for 400 years (Gen 15:13-16) until God rescued them to bring them back to this Promised Land. *Joshua 3* is a wonderful moment as they are poised to enter into all that God had promised them. (But, of course, we know that this is only a picture of all that God has truly promised to us in the final Promised Land that still lies ahead).

So the punch line of the story is 'Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed: all came to pass' (Joshua 21:45). God always delivers on any promise he ever makes.

Theme Sentence

Remember that God has a track record of keeping his promises, and so be confident he will do everything else he's promised to do.

Application

- Remember. Make it a habit to look back at what God has done in history.
- If God can keep his promise in the face of one impossible thing, he can do it in the face of any other impossible things too! (3:10 cf Roman 8:32)
- God will return his people not just to a land, but to our heavenly home.

Commentary

1:2 is the context: *Arise, go over this Jordan into the land*. Now this 'crossing'/ 'entering' will happen (which is why the verb 'to cross' comes 22x in chs 3-4).

CHAPTER 3

2 The three-day delay gives time for the impossibility to sink in. To be clear: the Jordan (at this time of year cf 3:15) was not a placid stream, but a swollen, raging torrent, probably a mile wide, up to 10-12 feet deep, covering a mass of tangled brush and jungle-growth on the riverbed.

3-4 From half a mile's distance, they'll get a grandstand view of 'the wonders' the Lord will do. There can be no mistaking it: where will the Lord lead us? Into the water! But they are not to look at the river, but at the ark!

'The ark' is mentioned 17x in chs 3-4. It symbolises God's presence with his people (cf Exod 25:10-22; Num 10:33-36), so the emphasis is that it is the Lord himself who is leading his people into the land. *The Lord is with you* was previously said to Joshua (1:9), and it is now to be seen by all (3:7). As Moses was able to lead the people through water (in Exod 14), so Joshua will too ... and this proves that the living God is among you (7).

The ark also contains 'a witness against you' (cf Dt 31:24-29) so it always begs the question: in this new phase of your national life, will you continue to be rebellious against the Lord's commands, or not? Read on!

10 The crossing verifies the conquest: if God can do one impossible thing, he can do the other impossible thing too, and drive out seven tribal groups (cf Gen 15:16 where he'd said that's what he would do, some 700 years earlier).

13 For the first time, we're told exactly what God will do: he'll turn a liquid into a solid! And presumably, given the scale of the thing (Adam [16] is 20 miles upstream!), the people in Jericho would have seen it too.

CHAPTER 4

2-7 We're twice told in 7 that the waters were 'cut off'. And the stones taken from the middle of the river are evidence that they really were - a sign of God's deliverance, character and promises-kept. 6a is nearly identical to Exod 12:26-27 since this crossing *into* directly mirrors that crossing *out of* (and 4:23 explicitly connects these two 'passings over'). God's purpose was always to bring his people *out-of-Egypt-and-into-this-Promised-Land*: not two tasks, but one.

Here is the job for those 12 men of 3:12 - they are the stone-carriers! The fact that there are twelve is all about the unity of the nation (since even those 2½ tribes who will settle East of the Jordan are part of this conquest [12 cf 1:12-16]). In fact, as at Exod 14:31, they are united around their exalted leader (4:14 = 3:7), and united in awe of their God.

The story pauses for their task (- see how 4:10b picks up the action from where it was at 3:17). But why are the stones so significant? The climax

at the end of the chapter (4:21-24) explains it. 'The greatest enemy of faith may be forgetfulness' (Davis). Reminders matter (- just think how Jesus tells us to remember him [in 1 Cor 11:23-26] ... he too gives us visual reminders). God builds many reminders into the believer's life. It only takes a bit of imagination to role-play the conversation between a six-year old and his daddy in years to come: the son's curiosity provides the opportunity to recount again how astounding is Israel's God.

As a side-line, it's worth noting that if this is an event to be remembered, it implies that this event is at least unusual, if not unique. We need to beware trivializing this into 'what are the uncrossable rivers in your life?!'

9 This verse is not easy: are these stones piled up in the middle of the Jordan additional to the pile on the bank (4:2f)? Possibly. Or perhaps the stones from the midst of the Jordan where the priests stood are the ones now piled up alongside the Jordan, where they still remain 'to this day'.

19 It's easy to skip over details like particular dates, but this one is important. It is the day the Passover Lamb is normally selected (cf Exod 12:3, 6). Or, to put it another way, this date is the anniversary of the day when Israel prepared to exodus Egypt, and now, 40 years later to the day, it's the day when they are preparing to arrive at the destination. In other words, this is the date that marks the beginning and completion of their redemption.

CHAPTER 5

1 We're told not only what the crossing meant to Israel, but also what it meant to the nations: they're scared! Indeed, this was the purpose of the event: 'so that all the peoples of the earth may know ...' (4:24).

2 The conquest is paused as there are some things to put right first. Obedience matters. The preceding 40 years stand as a painful reminder of the consequence of disobedience (6). We perhaps think of circumcision as a painful op ... but for the Jew it is far more: it stands for the covenant itself (cf Gen 17:10-14). To put it very starkly: no circumcision = no actual relationship with God. (That's slightly overstating it, of course: they were still God's people, but they had no sign to show they were.) And that is why only the circumcised (= God's people) may share in the Passover (cf Exod 12:48 etc): verse 10 is the natural follow-on to 2-9.

9 'No longer can the Egyptians crack their Hebrew jokes' (Davis): the Egyptians' cruel bondage, and scorn during 40 years of wandering is over.

11 For the first time, Israel can eat the produce of the land. This apparently insignificant action has huge implications: it's a sign that the people are now inside the land. The wilderness experience is over, and so 'manna', the food of the wilderness, ends (12). As teeth sink into delicious cakes, for the first time ever, each individual is reminded: God's promise is kept!

13 5:10-12 makes it clear that a huge block of the Bible's Big Story has ended, and a new section begins. They have entered the land; now they will take the land. (Note that the section markers in the following chapters are *when king(s) hear* [5:1; 9:1-2; 10:1-2; 11:1-3] because the story will now be all about God's victory over these occupying nations [1:3, 5].)