

## When God works upstream

**W**HEN THE ISRAELITES WERE finally ready to enter the land of Canaan, they had to cross the Jordan River which was swollen at flood stage. Joshua reported on the miracle God performed that enabled all of them to cross safely on dry ground:

As soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, 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 (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground (Joshua 3:15-17).

Since the Bible instructs us to be imitators of God, there are several lessons from this story we can learn:

God worked upstream in anticipation of what would be. God's timing was perfect. In some way he dammed the water many miles upstream so that, at the exact moment when the priest's

feet touched the water, the flow of the river stopped. The church also needs to anticipate the future and prepare for it whenever possible. For example, in the near future Castro's rule in Cuba will end and relationships with the U.S. will open up. Wouldn't it be wise for some visionaries to be working upstream, ready to move in with the gospel when Cuba is free?

God worked upstream even though the need wasn't as dramatic as it had been previously. Forty years earlier God parted the Red Sea and the trapped Israelites walked across on dry ground with a huge wall of water on each side. This time they're not trapped, the distance isn't as great, and the water isn't as deep, but God still performs a miracle. His work isn't show business, where every performance has to be more spectacular than the previous one. The church needs to trust God to meet the needs of the less spectacular programs as well as the spectacular.

God worked upstream even though the leadership was in transition. They had followed Moses for 40 years and God had used him in a mighty way. But now Moses was dead. God took this opportunity to demonstrate that his hand was on Joshua as it had been on Moses. "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'" (Joshua 3:7). The church needs to remember that when a man of God dies, moves, or retires, the same Holy Spirit can continue to work.

God worked upstream because the people were willing to walk by faith. The priests carried the ark just as God said. The people followed just as God said. The leaders entered the water just as God said, even though nothing had happened yet. As they walked by faith, the miracle happened.

The church can't expect God's blessing until it walks by faith. If we wait until all the "i's" are dotted and all the "t's" are crossed before we proceed, we'll never get started and we'll never experience the blessing of God. God honors those who trust him and who prove it by taking that first step into the water. ■

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## Day by Day With the Bible

Use this guide to read through the Bible in 12 months. Follow Bob Russell's comments on the highlighted text in every issue of THE LOOKOUT.

- Day 1**
- Mark 1:1-8
  - 1 Corin. 1:1-17
  - Psalm 72
  - Joshua 1, 2**

- Day 2**
- Mark 1:9-20
  - 1 Corin. 1:18-31
  - Psalm 73
  - Joshua 3-5**

- Day 3**
- Mark 1:21-34
  - 1 Corinthians 2
  - Psalm 74
  - Joshua 6, 7**

- Day 4**
- Mark 1:35-45
  - 1 Corinthians 3
  - Psalm 75
  - Joshua 8, 9**

- Day 5**
- Mark 2:1-12
  - 1 Corinthians 4
  - Psalm 76
  - Joshua 10-12**

- Day 6**
- Mark 2:13-17
  - 1 Corinthians 5
  - Psalm 77
  - Joshua 13, 14**

### What Do You Think?

1. Can you recall a time when God worked upstream in your life?
2. How did this experience strengthen your faith?