

Joshua 04 - Two Sets of Stones to Memorialize the Crossing of the Jordan

I. Israel's conquest of Canaan (Joshua 1:1—12:24)

(2) Israel crosses the Jordan (3:1—5:12)

(B) Memorial described (4:1-24)

Joshua 4

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1 Now when the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying,

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1 As soon as the entire nation had completed its crossing of the Jordan, the LORD spoke to Joshua. He said,

1 And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over Jordan, that the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying,

2 "Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from each tribe,

2 "Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from each tribe,

2 "Gather together twelve men from the people—one man from each tribe—

2 Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man,

3 and command them, saying, 'Take up for yourselves twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet are standing firmly, and carry them over with you and lay them down in the encampment where you will spend the night.'

3 and command them, saying, 'Take up for yourselves twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet are standing firm, and carry them over with you and lay them down in the lodging place where you will lodge tonight.'

3 and tell them, 'Pick up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan where the priests' feet were standing, bring them along with you, and put them down where you camp tonight.'

3 And command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night.

- 12 men, 12 stones, were to be a memorial of their deliverance. These stones were the 1st of 2 groups of 12 each (the 2nd by Joshua, v9).

— Previous to being transferred, they lay in the place of death, buried beneath the waters of the Jordan. Because of the ark, a type of Christ, they were lifted out of the riverbed and set up at Gilgal, the place of deliverance.

4 So Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the sons of Israel, one man from each tribe;

4 So Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the sons of Israel, one man from each tribe;

4 So Joshua called the twelve men whom he had chosen from the people of Israel, one man from each tribe.

4 Then Joshua called the twelve men, whom he had prepared of the children of Israel, out of every tribe a man:

5 and Joshua said to them, "Cross again to the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel.

5 and Joshua said to them, "Cross again to the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel.

5 Joshua told them, "Cross over again in front of the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan River. Then each of you pick up a stone on his shoulder with which to build a memorial, one for each of the tribes of Israel.

5 And Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of Jordan, and take ye up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel:

6 This shall be a sign among you; when your children ask later, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?'

6 Let this be a sign among you, so that when your children ask later, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?'

6 Let this serve as a sign among you, so that when your children ask in times to come, 'What do these stones mean to you,'

6 That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones?

- Piling stones was a common means of preserving the memory of important events (Cf. Gen 8:20; 12:7; 35:7)

7 then you shall say to them, 'That the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.' So these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever."

7 then you shall say to them, 'Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.' So these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever."

7 then you'll say to them, 'Because the waters of the Jordan River were cut off in front of the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan River, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.' So these stones will become a memorial to the Israelis forever."

7 Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever.

By means of these stones set up at Gilgal, the coming generations were to know what "the presence of the God of Jacob" (Ps 114:7) had accomplished. [Also, a comparison with the deliverance (baptism) at the Red Sea for their parents is made in v23.]

They were not to allow their intimate involvement in all of this to lessen their reverence for Him and His things. Rather they were to fear Him forever. (So also, we ourselves, as we observe Him work in our lives and ministry...)

8 So the sons of Israel did exactly as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, just as the LORD spoke to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel; and they carried them over with them to the encampment and put them down there.

8 Thus the sons of Israel did as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, just as the LORD spoke to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel; and they carried them over with them to the lodging place and put them down there.

8 The Israelis did just as Joshua commanded. They took up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan River—just as the LORD had spoken to Joshua—according to the number of the tribes of the Israelis, and they carried them over to where they would be pitching camp, and they put them down there.

8 And the children of Israel did so as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones out of the midst of Jordan, as the LORD spake unto Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over with them unto the place where they lodged, and laid them down there.

- There were two piles of 12 stones each, one at Gilgal (v3-8,20) and one in the Jordan River bed (v9)

— The monument at Gilgal probably consisted of large stones that people could not normally remove from the riverbed

— Building the other monument “in the middle of the (Jordan)” river was impossible under normal circumstances, due to the volume and current of the water there

— Thus, the Israelite children and the Canaanites had double proof, or two witnesses, of God's faithfulness and power

9 Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan at the place where the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing, and they are there to this day.

9 Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan at the place where the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing, and they are there to this day.

9 Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan River at the location where the feet of the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant had been standing, and they remain there to this day.

9 And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests which bare the ark of the covenant stood: and they are there unto this day.

- These are a second group of 12 stones, also representative. They were set in the same place: “where the feet of the priests...stood.”

— Joshua alone handled these stones. These would appear to represent those who are dead to sin, buried with Christ in baptism unto death (Rom 6:4).

— These two groups of stones illustrate of our having died with Christ (Col 2:20) and having been raised with Him (3:1)

— Stones, being completely passive, illustrate that all is done for the believer and not by him

— The 12 stones were taken up out of the Jordan, set up in Gilgal, may thus be viewed as “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5).

— Two sets of stones for a memorial; two sacraments in the NT: Baptism and Communion

— Other 12 stone allusions: Elijah's altar (1 Kings 18:31-32); breastplate of the high priest (Ex 28:29)

10 For the priests who carried the ark were standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything was completed that the LORD had commanded Joshua to speak to the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua. And the people hurried and crossed;

10 For the priests who carried the ark were standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything was completed that the LORD had commanded Joshua to speak to the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua. And the people hurried and crossed;

10 The priests who were carrying the ark stood in the middle of the Jordan River until everything had been done in accordance with what the LORD had commanded Joshua to speak to the people and with everything that Moses had commanded Joshua. So the people hurried and crossed over.

10 For the priests which bore the ark stood in the midst of Jordan, until every thing was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to speak unto the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua: and the people hastened and passed over.

11 and when all the people had finished crossing, *then* the ark of the LORD and the priests crossed in front of the people.

11 and when all the people had finished crossing, the ark of the LORD and the priests crossed before the people.

11 When all of the people had completed their crossing, the ark of the LORD and the priests crossed over in full view of the people.

11 And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over, that the ark of the LORD passed over, and the priests, in the presence of the people.

12 The sons of Reuben, the sons of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over in battle formation before the sons of Israel, just as Moses had spoken to them;

12 The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over in battle array before the sons of Israel, just as Moses had spoken to them;

12 Just as Moses had directed, the descendants of Reuben, the descendants of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over, dressed in battle regalia, in full view of the other Israelis.

12 And the children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, passed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses spake unto them:

13 about forty thousand equipped for war, crossed for battle before the LORD to the desert plains of Jericho.

13 about 40,000 equipped for war, crossed for battle before the LORD to the desert plains of Jericho.

13 About 40,000 soldiers equipped to do battle in the LORD's presence crossed over to the desert plains of Jericho.

13 About forty thousand prepared for war passed over before the LORD unto battle, to the plains of Jericho.

- A display of unity. Unless we are prepared to stand shoulder to shoulder with our brethren in Christ against our common foe, there will be no practical results.

— 40,000 of a total number of military-age men of ~137,000 (Cf. 1:14)

14 On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, so that they revered him, just as they had revered Moses all the days of his life.

14 On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; so that they revered him, just as they had revered Moses all the days of his life.

14 That day, the LORD exalted Joshua in the presence of all Israel so that they revered him just as they had revered Moses throughout his life.

14 On that day the LORD magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life.

15 Now the LORD said to Joshua,

15 Now the LORD said to Joshua,

15 Now the LORD had told Joshua,

15 And the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying,

16 "Command the priests who carry the ark of the testimony that they come up from the Jordan."

16 "Command the priests who carry the ark of the testimony that they come up from the Jordan."

16 "Command the priests who carry the Ark of the Testimony to come up from the Jordan River."

16 Command the priests that bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan.

17 So Joshua commanded the priests, saying, "Come up from the Jordan."

17 So Joshua commanded the priests, saying, "Come up from the Jordan."

17 So Joshua ordered the priests, "Come up from the Jordan River."

17 Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan.

18 It came about when the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD had come up from the middle of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up to the dry ground, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place, and went over all its banks as before.

18 It came about when the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD had come up from the middle of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up to the dry ground, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place, and went over all its banks as before.

18 As soon as the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD had come up from the middle of the Jordan River, and the soles of the priests' feet came up to dry ground, the water of the Jordan River returned to normal, covering its banks as it had done so before.

18 And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before.

- The text clarifies that it was the presence and power of God, which the ark symbolized, that held back (dried up) the waters of the Jordan

— When the priests removed the ark from the riverbed, the waters resumed their normal flow

19 Now the people came up from the Jordan on the **tenth of the first month** and camped at Gilgal, on the eastern edge of Jericho.

19 Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth of the first month and camped at Gilgal on the eastern edge of Jericho.

19 The people came up from the Jordan River on the tenth day of the first month and camped at Gilgal on the eastern outskirts of Jericho.

19 And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho.

- "...tenth of the first month" - the 10th of Nisan, the 40th anniversary, to the day, of the preparation of the Passover (Ex 12:3)

God had said in his wrath that they should wander 40 years in the wilderness, and at last he brought them into Canaan five days before the 40 years were ended, to show how little pleasure God takes in punishing, how swift he is to show mercy. God ordered it so that they should enter Canaan four days before the annual Passover, and on the very day when the preparation for it was to begin (Ex 12:3), because He would have them then to be reminded of their deliverance out of Egypt.

20 As for those twelve stones which they had taken from the Jordan, Joshua set *them* up at Gilgal.

20 Those twelve stones which they had taken from the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal.

20 Joshua set up the twelve stones that they had removed from the Jordan River at Gilgal.

20 And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal.

- The purpose of the memorial stones was the same as the purpose of the miracle at the Red Sea: to manifest the power of Yahweh to all people (Cf. v24; Ex 14:4,18) and cause God's people to fear Him (v24; Cf. Ex 14:31)

21 And he said to the sons of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?'

21 He said to the sons of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?'

21 Then he told the Israelis, "When your descendants ask their parents in years to come, 'What is the meaning of these stones?'

21 And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones?

22 then you shall inform your children, saying, 'Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground.'

22 then you shall inform your children, saying, 'Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground.'

22 you are to tell your descendants: 'Israel crossed this Jordan River on dry ground'

22 Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land.

23 For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the LORD your God had done to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed;

23 For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the LORD your God had done to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed;

23 because the LORD your God dried up the water of the Jordan River right in front of you, until you had crossed over, just as the LORD your God had done to the Reed Sea—which he had dried up in front of us until we had crossed it also.'

23 For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over:

24 so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, so that you may fear the LORD your God forever."

24 that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, so that you may fear the LORD your God forever."

24 Do this so that all of the people of the earth may know how strong the power of the LORD is, and so that you may fear the LORD your God every day."

24 That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever.

The Parable of Two Seas

There are two seas: both fed by the same river, filled with the same source. One brings forth green fields, fruit bearing trees, and is surrounded by verdant beauty. The other is desert, surrounded by death. Nothing can grow in or near it.

One is the Sea of Galilee. The other is the Dead Sea. Both are fed by the Jordan River. One passes its water on, and is synonymous with life itself. The other receives, but does not pass its water on further. It is contained in itself. It is synonymous with death. John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the Jordan at Beth Bara—the House of Passage—when He began His ministry.

Jesus promised us “living water,” and that our bellies would become torrents of living water to others—overflowing (John 4:10,11; 7:38). And a source to others around us. Some of us receive, but don’t become a source to others. Are we like the Sea of Galilee—surrounded by fruit bearing—or are we like the Dead Sea, only receiving and not passing on to others?