

## Notes on Joshua 4

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### The Memorial Stones – Joshua 4

Verses 1-3

1. How many men were given a special job? Why that many?
2. What job were they given?

#### *Men commanded to get stones from the river*

When all the people had crossed the Jordan safely God spoke to Joshua with instructions about the memorials they were to make. Twelve men were chosen, one from each tribe. Actually, these are almost surely the men Joshua had already mentioned in 3:12. Here God gave instructions what the men were to do.

These men were to go to the place in the river where the feet of the priests stood. There each man was to take a stone from the riverbed and carry it to the place where Israel would camp that night.

Later instructions would tell what purpose the stones would serve. But at this point it is important that these stones came from the very riverbed itself. Clearly it would be hard or impossible to obtain them normally. But with the river dried up by God's power, it was easy to obtain them.

Verses 4-7

3. What purpose would the stones serve?
4. Name other examples in which stones served as memorials. Give **b/c/v**.
5. Application: What can we learn from the fact God appointed a memorial for future generations?

#### *Purpose of the stones explained*

Joshua then told each of the twelve men to carry his stone on his shoulder and cross to the west side of the river ahead of the priests with the ark. The water remained held back so long as the priests and the ark stayed in the river, so the men had to get the stones and carry them to land before the priests left the river.

The stones would be a memorial sign to future generations to remember the crossing of the river. When future generations asked about the stones, the people would explain how the waters of the river were cut off so the ark (and the people) were enabled to cross over on dry ground. The stones would be a memorial to the people forever.

Note that God wants people to remember His great acts, and He has often authorized memorials whereby we can remember them. People tend to forget what God has done, if they are not reminded. Especially God's miracles were done to convince the people to believe in God. Future generations would not see the miracle, but the stones would remind them and would remind the parents to teach the children. We too need to remember to teach our children about God's great works of the past.

Note the use of the word "forever." This illustrates that this Old Testament word simply means for a long indefinite period of time. Are the stones still there? Not likely. And if they were, they would be so worn away we could not tell which stones they were, so they could not serve the desired purpose for us. "Forever" in the Old Testament does not mean a thing that never ends even into all eternity.

#### *Observations about memorials*

Memorials in the Old Testament often consisted of stones or piles of stones. See Exodus 20; Genesis 31:43-53; Joshua 24:25-27; 1 Samuel 7:11,12. The 10 Commands were written on stones

as a memorial to God's law. They were not the whole law, nor even necessarily the most important laws. They were a visible memorial to remind people of the law.

God's memorials today under the New Testament include the Lord's supper, which is a memorial feast reminding us of Jesus' death. Also the Bible is a written book reminding us, not just of God's law, but of His great miracles. We cannot see miracles today, even as Israel could not continue to see the Jordan dried up. But we have the memorial of them in the Bible (John 20:30,31).

Verses 8,9

6. What further memorial of stones did Joshua set up (v9)? (Think: Why would this memorial be effective?)

### ***Two memorials of stone***

The men did as Joshua commanded. Each of them took a stone from the midst of Jordan and carried it to the camp. There they laid them down, probably in a pile or heap.

But Joshua set up a second memorial. This one also consisted of twelve stones, but it was set up in the midst of the Jordan River. This was also in the place where the priests had stood while holding the ark.

This cannot be the same pile of stones that the twelve men took from the riverbed. Those stones were removed from the riverbed and placed on the ground in the camp as a memorial. These stones Joshua set up (v9) were stones still in the riverbed.

This would serve as a further confirmation that God had held back the river. How could one make a pile of stones in the middle of a river? It would again normally be difficult or impossible in that day. But it was easy while the river was dried up.

The writer comments that, whenever the book was written (probably near the time of Joshua's death) the pile of stones was still there. No doubt the river eventually wore them away, but they would have stood for many generations as a testimony to God's miracle.

So the people had two stone memorials of this event. One pile on land consisted of stones that had been removed from the river. The other pile consisted of stones piled up in the midst of the river. Both memorials served the same purpose.

Verses 10,11

7. How long did the priests and the ark stay in the river?

### ***The crossing completed***

The priests continued standing in the midst of the river, holding that ark as long as it was necessary for the water to be held back. Everything God had commanded had to be finished before they came out of the water. So the people hurried across, the stone memorials were accomplished as needed. And the priests had to stay in the riverbed the whole time.

Verses 12-14

8. Who led Israel into the land as the ark stood in the river?

### ***The men of the 2½ tribes lead the people into the land.***

The men of the tribes that settled east of Jordan had promised to go with Israel into the land (see on 1:12-18). Joshua had reminded them of this commitment, and they fulfilled it. They were apparently the first to cross over into the new land.

About 40,000 men of war crossed before God to the plains of Jericho prepared for battle. Based on the numbers of men counted in Numbers 26, this must have been the count of the men from the 2½ tribes. There were far more men than this even in those tribes, let alone all the tribes combined. The census counted all men age 20 and up, but doubtless many of them were not able to serve as soldiers. So presumably this was the number from the 2½ tribes who were able to fight.

The miracle the people saw at the river served to exalt Joshua in the sight of the people. They realized he was truly from God, so they listened to him as they had Moses before him. This was the purpose of miracles. See on 3:7.

Verses 15-18

9. What happened when the priests left the river?

### *The priests leave the river*

The priests had to stay in the riverbed until everyone had crossed and nothing more needed to be done in the river. This was all accomplished now, so God gave the command to Joshua to tell the priests to come up out of the river.

As soon as this command was obeyed, when the priests' feet touched dry ground, immediately the waters of the Jordan returned to their place as they had been before, still overflowing the banks as before.

So the water stood off immediately when the priests' feet touched it and then came back immediately when their feet left it. All this happened by God's command, proving clearly to the people that it was a miracle by God's power.

Verses 19-24

10. What month and day was this?

11. Where did Israel camp and set up the stones?

12. What can we learn from this story about the purpose of miracles?

### *The memorial stones set up in Gilgal*

The people completed crossing the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month of the year. They camped in an area that was known as Gilgal (see MAP). This was near Jericho, but obviously quite close to the river. See 5:9.

There Joshua took the stones the twelve men had carried up out of the river, and he set them up as a memorial as God had commanded. Again the people were told the purpose of the stones. When future generations saw the stones and asked about them, the people were to tell them these were put there as a memorial of the time the people crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

The people would thereby be reminded that God had dried up the Jordan River, just as He had enabled the people to cross the Red Sea on dry ground. The purpose of the memorial was to remind them of the miracle. And the purpose of the miracle was to prove to them the power of God, so they would respect and fear Him forever.

This demonstrates the two purposes of miracles. They served to convince people to believe in God and that the God of the Bible is the true God. They also serve to convince people to recognize men through whom God works as being really from God – Joshua in this case – because they are the ones through whom God's power was demonstrated. Of course, still a third purpose (not referred to here) is to convince us to believe that the Bible is the word of God, since this is the book which records these miracles and was written by these inspired men.

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