

THE TWO MEMORIALS

JOSHUA-THE ADVENTURE AND VICTORY OF FAITH

by Doug Goins

In Joshua 3:7-17, we explored the crossing of the Jordan River by the two million people of the Hebrew nation. We compared the nation of Israel as cross-over people to ourselves as cross-over people in the church of Jesus Christ. A number of folks commented to me on how contemporary that passage is in regard to this issue of facing cross-over times. I got the idea of linking our own transition times in life to the crossing of the Jordan from a paragraph by C.H. Parkhurst in *Butler's Bible Works* (1889):

The Egypt-history, the wilderness-history, the Jordan-history, never become obsolete. The Books of Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, are almost as valid histories of our individual lives as of the life of the Hebrews at large. These chapters, and this third of Joshua, are like some of the Psalms of David in this respect, that though so old they still carry with easy grace the sentiments and experience of to-day with which the men of to-day laud them. It is one of the marvellous characteristics of these old Bible-narratives that they still furnish us better figures and phrases than any new ones we can invent for describing events and transitions in our own experience.

Joshua 4 retells the story of the crossing of the Jordan, not once but twice, adding significant details. This attention to detail in chapter 4 is important both for the memories of the nation of Israel and for our life of faith today. In addition to the crossing of the river, this passage records the events of Israel's first day in the land of Canaan and their lodging at Gilgal the first night. At the heart of this record is the collecting and arranging of two different piles of boulders into cairns, or monuments of memorial. These two monuments will be symbols of God's activity in the life of the people through the miraculous events at the Jordan.

Verses 1-14 will focus on stones that are taken out of the river, another group of stones that are left in the middle of the river, and the details of the crossing through the river. Verses 9 and 10a summarize what is central in these opening verses: "And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day. For the priests who bore the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan, until everything was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua."

The second half of the chapter, verses 15-24, will focus on the stones that are taken up out of the river to Gilgal and set up as a monument. The theme in this second half of the chapter is coming up out of the Jordan. Verse 19: "The people came out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal."

What we're going to see through this entire chapter is that God was in complete control of all the activities at the Jordan River that day. He told the priests when to enter the river and when to leave the river and go up on the other side. God told the river when to roll back and expose the dry ground, and when to flood back into place again. Both the people and the water obeyed God that day. And everything worked out as God had planned. It was a day that glorified the Lord and, as God promised it would in chapter 3, it also turned out to be a day that magnified the leadership of Joshua before the people.

Let's look carefully at verses 1-14, at the heart of this section these stones in the river. The first eight verses talk about the stones that are going to be taken out of the river to the place of lodging. Look at God's command to Joshua in verses 1-3:

When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, "Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, and command them, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood, and carry them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight.'"

This explains the purpose that God had for the twelve men chosen back in Joshua 3:12 when he said, "Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man." Joshua obeyed the Lord, and in verses 4-7 he tells these twelve men what to do. Verses 4 and 5 give the specific instruction:

Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe; and Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel...."

The men are to take twelve boulders, heavy enough that they need to hoist them onto their backs, and carry them out from right in front of where the priests are standing with the ark in of the middle of the river. Joshua explains the purpose of these stones in verses 6 and 7:

"...That this may be a sign among you, when your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' Then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial for ever."

These twelve stones are to be used as physical reminders of the dramatic way that God held back the southward flow of the Jordan River, so that the people were able to cross over on dry ground while the priests throughout an entire day held the ark of the covenant high so that everyone crossing over could see it. My son's comment was, "Those must have been pretty buffed out priests to hold that thing up all those hours!"

Joshua also suggests that these memorial stones on the west bank in Gilgal would pique the natural curiosity of the children of these Israelites who were yet to be born, children of the land of Canaan. When these second-generation inheritors of the promised land asked about the significance of the memorial stones, the fathers of the family, as spiritual heads of their households, could rehearse their own personal experiences of how God had led his people across the Jordan River at flood time, a miraculous act that was never to be forgotten.

These twelve men respond immediately in obedience to Joshua's direction. Verse 8:

And the men of Israel did as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones out of the midst of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, as the LORD told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there.

We're going to come back to these particular stones in the second half of this chapter. Now let's look again at verses 9 and 10a, where the twelve stones are to be placed in the middle of the Jordan:

And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day. For the priests who bore the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan, until everything was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua.

Joshua himself goes down into the river alone, and standing in front of these priests who are holding the ark, he sets up twelve stones in the very middle of the riverbed of the Jordan. Apparently, this is Joshua's own

moment of memorial. To the Jews who are watching, it must seem strange to see their leader do this. After all, who but God will be able to see the twelve stones heaped together in the riverbed? It's interesting that we're not told specifically that God commanded Joshua to set up this second monument, but most certainly he did because of the strong emphasis on Joshua's doing everything that God commanded him through Moses. And obviously Joshua is not reproached for what he does. So when the parents of the children on the west bank of Gilgal talk about the visible memorial stones, they will also tell them, "You can't see it, but under the waters there are twelve more stones that Joshua, our leader, put there."

Verses 10b-14 give us some miscellaneous details about the crossing of the river. The people are on the west bank, and they watch the ark and the priests come up. Verses 10b-11:

The people passed over in haste; and when all the people had finished passing over, the ark of the LORD and the priests passed over before the people.

Then in verses 12 and 13, we see that the two and a half tribes live up to their promise they made to Joshua and to Moses before him. They participate in the conquest of the land.

The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh passed over armed before the people of Israel, as Moses had bidden them; about forty thousand ready armed for war passed over before the LORD for battle, to the plains of Jericho.

Then in verse 14 there is a final, wonderful statement of how God lives up to the promise that he made early that morning, back in 3:7, to magnify Joshua:

On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him, as they had stood in awe of Moses, all the days of his life.

His spiritual authority as a leader has been confirmed among the people through this miraculous working of God.

Now Joshua is going to start over and retell the story that we just read, but from a different point of view. Now it's not the stones in the middle of the river that are central, but the stones that are brought to Gilgal. It begins in verses 15-19a with a summary of how the priests and the ark and the people all come up out of the Jordan River together:

And the LORD said to Joshua, "Command the priests who bear the ark of the testimony to come up out of the Jordan." Joshua therefore commanded the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan." And when the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD came up from the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up on dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks, as before.

The people came up out of the Jordan....

Four times that last phrase is repeated. Obviously, the immediate point is that finally this narrative of how the ark came out of the bed of the Jordan is brought to its conclusion. But the ark has a different name this time: the ark of the testimony. It could also be translated "the ark of the sign," or "the ark of reminder." Even the ark itself will have its place in the worship of this nation. When people hear of the ark in the tabernacle and the temple, it will serve as a reminder of what God did at the Jordan River.

In verses 19-24, the closing verses of the chapter, Joshua will set up a cairn or monument at Gilgal with the boulders that were taken out of the river earlier. Verses 19-20:

The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal.

That date, the tenth day of the first month, is significant. In Old Testament chronology, exactly forty years earlier to the day, Israel had marched out of Egypt. The Passover lamb had been killed, the blood had been sprinkled, and the nation had been delivered from the bondage of Egypt. Remember, for forty years in the interim they had wandered in the wilderness of unbelief, carnality, and disobedience. But now they have come through the Jordan, and they are camping at Gilgal.

Gilgal is an important name. Names always are significant in the Old Testament. The word Gilgal means, "The reproach has been rolled away." A beachhead has been established in the land of promise. Forty years of spiritual defeat and failure have been rolled away. And the fact that they have this beachhead at Gilgal means that they are now ready to follow the Lord wholeheartedly into the land that he is giving them.

In verses 21-24 Joshua speaks again to the people at Gilgal. It is an elaboration of the message that he recorded earlier in verses 6 and 7: "...That this may be a sign among you, when your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' Then you shall tell them [what God did]." Look at how similar verse 21 is to verse 6:

And he said to the people of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, 'What do these stones mean?'..."

It begins the same way, with the question the children will invariably ask about the significance of these stones. Beginning in verse 22 he emphasizes four things about the fathers' telling their children of the miraculous events of that day at the Jordan.

First of all, they're to start, as he said in verse 7, with their own personal experiences of what they saw, heard, and felt, with the impact it had on them. Look at verses 22 and 23a:

"...Then you shall let your children know, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over..."

He's saying to the nation, "Tell your story. Keep it clear in your memory what God did for you." The second thing he'll say is that the memory of this event should also trigger memories of God's miraculous activity in other people's lives. They are not to talk just about themselves, but about how God has done the same things in other places, at other times, for other people. Look at verse 23b:

...As the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over....

That refers to Joshua and Caleb. They are to tell the stories of the generations that preceded them, of God's faithfulness and activity.

Then, third and fourth, in verse 24, he lists two reasons that they are to tell their children the stories of these memories. The first is this:

...So that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty....

Joshua is saying, "Tell these stories because people all over the world need to hear them and be overwhelmed with God's power and greatness, his saving activity in your lives, all throughout history." It will impact people. Remember, when we studied the life of Rahab that's exactly what happened (see Discovery Paper 4457). She had heard the stories of the miracle-working character of God at the Red Sea. The nation was paralyzed with fear, but because of those stories she was opened up to saving reality.

The second reason is in the last phrase of verse 24:

...That you [as a people] may fear the LORD your God for ever."

Here Joshua is saying, "Keep telling the stories so that you don't trivialize God or your relationship to him, so that your own sense of awe and wonder and reverence is deepened and strengthened the more you hear them."

Let me briefly mention the powerfully important place of sacred memory and the absolute imperative that we teach our children about how God has worked miraculously in our lives. There are so many things that should trigger our memories of God's activity in our lives: places that we've been, people who have been influential in our lives, experiences, mementos that we treasure and hold onto because of what they signify to us---including the Bible itself. I hope you love your Bible. I hope it has great memories for you. After certain truth exploded into your awareness and you made a note, you can go back to that and thank God for revealing himself at that place and that time through the word. We've also been given as the church two powerful memorials in baptism and the Lord's Supper.

All of these memorial stones must be shared with our children and explained to them. Ron Ritchie has preached two wonderful messages out of Joshua 4 focusing on this specific issue of memorial stones and the value of teachable moments with our children. They are Discovery Papers 3101 and 3723. You ought to read them, especially if you're just starting out as parents. Ron creatively explains how we can buy up those kinds of opportunities.

Now that we've worked through all of chapter 4, I want us to stand back and look at the chapter as a whole. Remember, this story is told from two perspectives: first, that of crossing through the river and the events that occurred while Israel was in the river---the monument erected from stones there---and second, that of coming up out of the river, camping at Gilgal, and the events that occurred on the west bank of the river---the monument erected from river stones on the plains of Jericho.

This dramatic telling and then retelling of the crossing of the Jordan, in both chapter 3 and chapter 4, emphasizes that this is one of the most important events in the history of Israel. It signified the cutting off or the rolling away of their past. Remember, Gilgal means "the reproach is rolled away." They made a decision to walk into the land through the river, and all of the old life of the wilderness was cut off from them. In fact, the name "Hebrew" comes from this event. We noted in Discovery Paper 4459 the emphasis on the verb to cross over, which is the Hebrew word *aber*. It appears twenty-one times in chapters 3, 4, and 5. That verb is the root of the word "Hebrew." They were people who had crossed over, who had left something behind.

It's interesting that throughout Old Testament history the Gentile nations surrounding Israel used the term pejoratively to make fun of them, the same way that the earliest followers of Jesus Christ in the city of Antioch were called Christians, "Christ ones," or those associated with Christ, in a derogatory way. The name Christian, like the name Hebrew, was something that cut those people off from their old life. The apostle Paul describes our life in Christ as having the world crucified to us and us to the world (see Galatians 6:14).

That's what happened to Israel at the Jordan River. They were cut off from all the other peoples and from their old pagan lifestyle. Israel was a new nation, a new entity. God had given them a new law, a new way of doing things that was completely different, completely disassociated from their history of self-effort and striving. The nation had to make a clean break with the past. They were never to think of going back across the river. The first half of chapter 4 focuses on the depth of the river with its stones of memorial and really of burial. Those stones were to remind Israel that their old life was buried under the waters of the Jordan. That old life was dead. The second half of the chapter focuses on the coming up, the deliverance from the river, the stones of resurrection---for the monument in Gilgal was really a monument of resurrection. That was to remind Israel that because of the miraculous power of God they were now able to walk in newness of life.

In our experience as Christians, that event in Joshua is the counterpart of the truth Paul expresses in Romans 6:1-11. Think about it in the context of the passing through the Jordan:

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How can we who died to sin still live in it? [We have crossed through the Jordan River, how could we ever go back?] Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through

baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection...."

That describes our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. Paul says that we've been baptized into Christ. That word baptize means we've been placed into Christ, that we are identified with him. What Christ went through in his death, burial, and resurrection, we go through. He not only died for our sins, Paul says in this passage, but we died with him. We are identified with him. And just as the ark of the covenant passed through the Jordan---remember, that was a symbol of the Lord God in the midst of his people---so the Lord Jesus went through death, burial, and resurrection. And now as Paul says here in Romans 6, death no longer has any claim over him.

"...Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Death can't touch Jesus Christ. Sin can't touch him. Dead men don't sin. All the debts accrued in the past are gone. The old life in reality has no power, no influence. He is free, a new man. Christ, who never sinned but who assumed our sins, in his death on the cross was separated from all of them. And Paul says that we are placed into Christ. This is something that we really can't understand rationally. It's beyond intellect, beyond theologizing. It's something that only the Holy Spirit of God can make real to us, but it's absolutely true. Just as the Levites were linked with the ark all through chapters 3 and 4 of Joshua, carrying it into the Jordan, standing with it all day holding it high, and coming out the other side with it, so we're identified with Christ in his passage through death, burial, and resurrection. Our old life has been cut off.

Listen to these great words from 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." Again, Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me." That is the great central fact of the Bible. We have been identified with Christ: We have died with him, we have been buried with him, and we have been raised to newness of life with him. And what we're called to do is believe it, reckon it to be true, and then to act on it. When we identify ourselves by an act of the will with Jesus Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection, then we begin to experience real life---a new quality of life, a resurrection kind of life. It's the most fundamental, basic fact of Christian experience, if we're going to live a life of adventure and victory.

Again, this spiritual reality was foundational for the Hebrews, the cross-over people. They had committed themselves to crossing the Jordan, and when the river flowed back to flood level, they were cut off from the life of reproach in the wilderness that they had formerly lived. They couldn't go back; it was all over. They were new creatures. And now for us today as "Christ ones," Christians, we're invited to enjoy that adventure and victory of faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us.

As I was finishing up my study for this message on Friday morning, I was working at the computer, and I got writer's block. So I started reading my e-mail. And in my e-mail was a memorial stone from a friend who has really begun to catch on to this truth. For a year I've watched the change in this man's understanding of his identity and in how he views life. He has decided to live his life believing that his new identity in Christ is real, that he is dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. I've watched him courageously face into the teeth of problems in his life. He sees them as having a purpose. He is building his whole life on the basis of this new identity. This is a man who understands that he has crossed over the Jordan, who has really reckoned himself to be dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. I want to read an excerpt from his musing on identity issues. You will hear in this both stones of burial and stones of resurrection.

Life at times can be like a raging storm which seems to have no end in sight. At times we may

be faced with what seems to be the destruction of all that we own, no matter how great or small that may be. It is during these times that we are faced with trials and tribulations which seem to shake the very foundations of our so-called lives. These times can lead to one of two things: our utter destruction or growth beyond our wildest dreams. For the Lord has promised that we will never be put through a trial which we do not have the strength (in him) to endure. The amazing thing about this is that one may realize that he or she is able to endure struggles beyond what they ever thought they could endure. Sometimes it takes some serious trials in order for God to be able to get our attention and set our perspective to his view and not that of the world. Praise the Lord if you have never been faced with trials which seem to threaten your very existence (at least in the eyes of the world), but some of us are a little harder to shake from our old ways. It may take a raging storm to get us to turn our sight and mind to the only sure thing in life, Christ Jesus.

It's amazing how fickle our faith can be. When things seem cool and everything's going smoothly, it's so easy to put off God and get immersed in our stuff and life. But when all the stuff is gone and the storm seems to have no end in sight, we finally come face-to-face with our true self and the pathetic excuse which we call life. I, for one, can say that though my life is in shambles financially and my marriage is at times teetering on the abyss, I have never felt closer to the Lord than I do right now. This year has opened my eyes to the depth of my need for God in every aspect of my life. My so-called career and expertise in software engineering has been called into question over the last six months and I've come to realize that I can't even do that "on my own" anymore. The one thing I used to always be able to count on, has been smashed at my feet. I have always prided myself in my ability to be creative in my work, but I now realize that even that creativity is a gift from God. In this last month, I have finally opened my heart and mind to the inspirations and nudgings of the Lord with respect to my technical struggles at work and you know what I found out? God's a pretty good C++ programmer!! I guess it's not really too surprising when you consider the DNA programming which he has woven into all the living creatures of the universe. I realize that I don't have the ability to do my job, fix my marriage or solve my financial problems apart from God. But with him, anything is possible!! I don't know how and I don't know when, but I do know that God is very real in my life and that he is committed to be with me and see me through my current situation.

"Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me."

Catalog No. 4460
Joshua 4:1-24
Seventh Message
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October 29, 1995

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