

In Joshua 3 we read of the power of God in the ark *opening* the Jordan River and *leading* them across into the Promised Land. It is a sign from the living God that He is with Joshua and that by His power which brought them all the way to the land, they will enter and inherit the land.

Now in Joshua 4 the story of the crossing of the Jordan continues but there's a new focus here: not on the *crossing* itself, but on *remembering* the crossing of the Jordan which the LORD performed so that the nations will hear about the LORD, and the future generations will fear the LORD.

This chapter is about remembering the mighty, saving deeds of God the LORD. It is about memorials:

1. The command of the LORD to build a memorial
2. Also instruction from the LORD about the significance 意义或重要性 of this memorial (what it stands for)
3. And a word from the LORD about the purpose of this memorial

1. The command for this memorial (Joshua 4:1-9)

This is an important event in Israel's history so the LORD commands His people to remember it. And to *help* them remember it, the LORD commands them to set up a visible memorial. The instructions for this memorial are very specific (4:2-3):

--choose 12 men from among the people, one from each tribe,

--tell them to take 12 stones from the River bed: the stones are to come from the middle of the river where the priests stood

--you are to carry them over to the west bank and put them down at the place where you lodge tonight.

We read of this three times – first the LORD commanding Joshua (4:1-3), then Joshua commanding the 12 men (4:4-7), then the 12 men actually doing just as Joshua commanded...just as the LORD told Joshua (4:8-9). There is great emphasis here on following orders. The LORD has created memories, and the people must build a memorial to mark these memories. This must be remembered for their future well-being; remembering this is not an option but a requirement.

The LORD said: This memorial is to serve as a sign 记号 among you (6)... **These stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever.** (7b) In the future when your children visit and see these stones, they will ask: **What do these stones mean to you?** (4:6) With the help of these 12 stones, the story will be told over and over again how the LORD cut off the waters of the Jordan River and brought over all 12 tribes into the Promised Land – one stone for each tribe! A full deliverance!

By this memorial God left behind a testimony of His great work for Israel. But why? Why is the LORD so *emphatic* about having this memorial built at the Jordan River? Because – as we know from the rest of Scripture – there is such a strong tendency for us to forget. That is the premier danger of faith (writes one author): *forgetting*. The truth gets old and cold. We fail to keep a grip on God's work of redemption. In Psalm 78, for 72 verses David mournfully 悲哀 charts the forgetfulness of Israel: **"They did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law; they forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them."** (78:10-11; cf. vv. 54-57) Forgetting does not mean having no recall 不记得, but it no longer *matters* to you, it no longer *defines* you. What defines you instead is making money, making the team, having a nice life, growing the business, etc.

It's a serious and chronic problem among God's people and it needs a remedy. Thus, God commanded a memorial for them.

- In the same way for us today, we have been given the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are memorials commanded by Christ, so let us use them faithfully and diligently. Through these the Holy Spirit helps Christians remember, for generations to come, the great work that Jesus did for us on the cross as an offering to pay for sin.
- The written Word is also a memorial. The same word "memorial" is used in Exodus 17 in the battle of Israel against Amalek. Of this battle the LORD said to Moses: **"Write this as a memorial in a book and recite** 告诉 **it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."** (Exodus 17:14) God had His Word and works of salvation written down so that we will read and remember Him. Let us use the Word to know our Saviour!

The words **memorial** and **remembering** are important. It means much more than letting something flit through your mind. It means recalling something in such a way that it keeps its grip 把握 on us and carries us forward into the future. It captures the mind so that we live every moment in the realization of who God is for us in His covenant of grace: A God who keeps His promises, whose work is our salvation. Apart from Him life is meaningless!

Notice the timing of God's command for a memorial.

- Israel has just stepped into the Promised Land. There is so much to do in the new land, so much work that lies ahead, such a future to look forward to. Let's go! Let's get to work! But the first thing God tells them to do when they're across is to STOP and REMEMBER! Their whole future depends on remembering the God who saved them. If they forget God and His gracious work of salvation, their life and work in the Promised Land will come to nothing.
- The same is true for us today: even though there is much work for the Church to do for God's kingdom, it all depends on His grace. Faith remembers that it is only by God's grace that we've come this far, and only by His grace that we can move forward.

[One more note about the stone memorial: Some believe that two piles of stones were set up for two memorials of the crossing of the Jordan River. This idea comes from 4:9, **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.** I agree with those

who think that this verse should be translated that **Joshua set up 12 stones from the midst of the Jordan** rather than **in the midst of the Jordan**. The rest of the chapter indicates only 1 memorial; a pile of stones in the middle of a rushing river would not be much of a memorial!]

2. The Significance of this memorial (Joshua 4:10-19)

Now we move to the middle of Joshua 4, and we notice the text also moves from focusing on the memorial to focusing on the historical event that the memorial points to: the crossing of the Jordan River. It's not the memorial itself that is significant and must be remembered, but the great work of God their Saviour at the Jordan River. So the chapter takes us back to the actual event in verse 10, back to the ark of the covenant carried by the priests: **The priests bearing 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 people passed over in haste 急忙. And when all the people had finished passing over, the ark of the LORD and the priests passed over before the people.** (4:10-11)

As we look at this chapter, we see at least 4 different ways in which God's work is to be remembered by Israel. The crossing of the Jordan River is significant for Israel in these ways:

a) In the miracle of the crossing God gave His people comfort of His real, powerful presence (4:10, 14)

The greatest significance of the event to be remembered with the help of pile of stones is that God showed them that the living God is present with them. In the ark of the covenant that went before, with, and after them, they were kept completely safe. While the golden ark stood still in the middle of the Jordan until everything was finished, all the people crossed over, and their livestock 牲畜 too! He who travelled with them there was teaching them that He would continue to go with them the whole way. He also showed them there that they could trust His servant Joshua and follow his lead, since God's Word lived in him.

By returning to Gilgal on a regular basis, as they did, since Gilgal was their base of operations, they would see the stones and be reminded of the power and faithfulness of the great God who was with them, leading them in their conquest.

Isn't this exactly how God comforted the Church of the New Testament times in her early stages? When the 12 disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, a violent storm came which threatened their lives. Jesus stood up in their midst, told the storm to be still, and took them safely over to the other side. And they said: Who is this? Even the winds and the waves obey Him? So God continually comforts His weak Church in every age by His powerful presence. Through Jesus we have safe passage.

b) In the miracle of the crossing of the Jordan River God demonstrates the unity of His people (4:12-13)

As the people crossed over in haste, they did so as a united nation of 12 tribes. This included 40,000 armed soldiers from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. These 2.5 tribes who already received land on the east side of the River. Before he died, Moses had commanded them that they had to send soldiers into the land of Canaan to help their brothers take over the land. The people of God were to act as one united army, not each tribe looking out for itself and ignoring the needs of the rest of God's people! This memorial of 12 stones was a reminder that God brought all 12 tribes across the Jordan River. Even though they would all end up with their own tracts of land 大片土地, God's work at the Jordan River is a witness to their unity as His chosen and saved people. And what a reminder to us that even though the true church is spread out in congregations over the province, nation, and globe, God has brought us together in His work of salvation and calls us to serve one another!

c) The stone memorial also pointed to a significant event of divine separation (4:15-18)

When the crossing was finished, the LORD told Joshua to call the priests out of the Jordan River bed. Joshua 4:17-18: **So Joshua 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.**

What a powerful thing for the watching nation to see: no turning back now! They were on the other side. The memorial on the west bank reminded them of their new home. Just as the renewed flow of the Red Sea cut Israel off from Egypt, so now the renewed flow of the flooding Jordan River cut them off from the rebellion and unbelief of the wilderness wanderings. God had secured them in the Promised Land. They were committed. The LORD, through the ark, was directing them forward into the new life of trusting God, not backward into the old life of rebellion in the desert! No turning back! And so he reminds us today that when He saves us He brings us into His kingdom and cuts us off from the old life in the kingdom of darkness. Let no Christian look back to the misery of the old life and think, "Those were the good old days!" God has brought you over – Rejoice in His gracious work of separating you from the world and bringing you into His kingdom!

d. This memorial marks an event of divine redemption (Joshua 4:19)

The real significance of this memorial is found in verse 19 – **The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho.** Do you remember why that day was important – the 10th day of the first month? That was 4 days before their Exodus from Egypt when every family was to find a lamb, a Passover Lamb, and set it aside for 4 days. Then, on the evening of the 14th day they were to kill it and smear 涂抹 the blood on the door-posts of their homes so they could be delivered from the Angel of death. Every year they were supposed to remember

that event when they were delivered from Egypt. On the 10th day of the 1st month they were to set aside a Passover Lamb, and clean their homes of all leaven, in preparation for the Passover feast on the evening after the 14th day. (see Exodus 12:1-6, 21-27)

So why did God choose this day to take them across the Jordan River? To remind them that now their redemption is complete. God not only began their redemption when He set them free from death and judgment at the exodus. He also finishes their redemption by bringing them into the rest of the Promised Land. What a beautiful picture of our salvation! When we believe in the true Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, God saves us. He forgives all our sins. He takes us out of the kingdom of darkness. He takes us out the grip of sin and Satan. But He doesn't stop there! He will lead us and carry us all the way to the finish line, into the eternal rest of the Promised Land of heaven and the new creation!

The stones were a powerful testimony that the God who began their salvation by the blood of the Lamb in the exodus from slavery, powerfully finished their salvation by their entrance into Canaan. God never does a half-job for those who believe in Him! **He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus!** (Philippians 1:6)

3. The purpose of this memorial (Joshua 4:20-24)

In the last section of Joshua 4 the LORD takes us back to the memorial: (4:20) **And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal.** After constructing this simple pile of stones, Joshua went deeper into the purpose of this memorial. (4:21-24).

The main purpose is to tell the children of the mighty deeds of God in redeeming His people. **And he said to the people of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?' 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, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over.** (Joshua 4:21-23)

The parents have to say to the children in the generations to come – the LORD your God dried up the river for you. God thinks covenantally 盟约性的 He thinks not only about the generation crossing over, but the generations that follow, and He is doing it as much for them as well as the first generation. We must learn to think covenantally as well: when the LORD saved your greatgrandparents, he was thinking not only them, but he was thinking of you too! And when He saved you He was also thinking of your greatgreatgrandchildren.

We can always make the Gospel present to our children: it is not an event that belongs to the past and we memorize as a historical fact. What He did then for us, is for our children to embrace as for them now. Salvation does not work mechanically or automatically in the covenant of grace. It is to be personally told and personally embraced with each new generation.

Do we tell our children the mighty stories of God – memorialized in the Bible and in the sacraments? Do you make much of them to your children? And do you press them upon your children as what God did – even though it was long ago – for them?

Matthew Henry: *It is the duty of parents to acquaint 认识 their children early with the word and works of God, that they may be trained up in the way they should go.* Are we serious about passing on the faith? We have only 1 window of opportunity; that time slips away so quickly! We may run here and there and everywhere for our kids, but are we making the Gospel our first priority 第一优先? If we are too busy for this, remember, you have become too busy for their salvation – and that is the greatest sin 最严重的罪!

God spends much time on memorials here because he wants us to spend much time with the generations that are coming!!

This one main purpose for the memorial leads to two other purposes given in verse 24: **so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever.** Why tell the future generations the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD? For 2 reasons:

- 1) **so that the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty!** Francis Schaeffer: *The stones were to tell the other nations round about that this God is different. He really exists; he is a living God, a God of real power who lives in this world.* In other words, you must tell your children the mighty deeds of the LORD so that the nations will know He is powerful. God wants the nations to know about Joshua and the Jordan River – but especially about Jesus and His death and resurrection – so that they will make know among the nations who the true God is and what He has done. (Psalm 96:2-3) We are not to keep this saving knowledge of the true God to ourselves, but the nations must overhear!
- 2) **that you may fear the LORD your God forever.** As parents we may look to the LORD to save our children, and to bring them into the true fear of the LORD, as we talk of Him to them. The true fear of God is a combination of *trust, love, and reverence* 敬畏 Let us talk to them about both of the God of the Red Sea and of the Jordan River, the God who takes us out of sin and judgment (the Red Sea) and into the eternal life (the Jordan River). This points to Jesus who died to set us free from death, and rose again to bring us into eternal life.