

# Joshua

## Lesson 4

### Chapter 4

Have you ever had a special day in your life where you wanted to do something that would cause you to remember what happened that day? For instance, on the day of your wedding, pictures were taken so you could remember that special event. We have carved images of people all across the United States created to remember, for good or bad, the events they were involved in sometime in the history of our nation. Such was the day of the crossing of the Jordan River by the Nation of Israel when they entered the Promised Land. It was such a special day for the LORD that He instructed Joshua to set memorial stones where all the people of Israel in all the generations to come could be reminded of what He did for them as they entered the Promised Land for the first time.

#### B. The Memorial Stones of the Jordan River (4:1-11)

##### 1. Stones for a Memorial at Gilgal (4:1-11)

###### a) Each Man to Take a Stone (4:1-3)

Continuing with the details of the events on the day of the crossing of the river to enter the Promised Land for the first time, the LORD had Joshua gather memorial stones from the dry bed of the Jordan River for two purposes. In chapter 3, the LORD instructed Joshua to have tribes select a man from each tribe for a special task during the crossing. First, each man was to take a stone for a memorial at Gilgal. Chapter 4, verse 1. *“Now when all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying, <sup>2</sup>‘Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from each tribe, <sup>3</sup>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.’”* (4:1-3)

All the nation of Israel had crossed the river on dry ground, and the priests were still standing in the river bed. After the people were across, the LORD told Joshua the purpose for selecting the twelve men. Joshua sent the men back into the river bed to collect the stones. We have to wonder how big these stones were and what they weighed. From the river to where they were going to camp was about a mile and a half away. The memorial of the stones was going to be set up in the first campsite after the crossing. The Hebrews will call it Gilgal, which means *rolling*. Indeed, Gilgal is set on the rolling hills. Later we will be told an expanded meaning for the name Gilgal.

###### b) Each Man to Select a Stone (4:4-5)

Joshua did exactly as the LORD commanded. Each man was to select a stone from the Jordan. How would he carry the stone? Verse 4. *“So Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the sons of Israel, one man from each tribe; <sup>5</sup>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.’”* (4:4-5)

Each man carried the stone on his shoulder, not in a cart or with the help of another person. The stone could not be heavier than what one man could carry for about a mile and a half.



Figure 5: The Rolling Hills at Gilgal

### c) Each Man to Explain a Stone (4:6-7a)

The twelve selected stones were for a purpose. They had a story behind them. What was the story? Each man was to explain the story of the stones to all the generations of the children of Israel still to come. Verse 6. *“Let this be a sign among you, so that when your children ask later, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’<sup>7</sup> 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.’”* (4:6-7a)

The memorial stones had a dual purpose. First, it was a reminder of the covenant the LORD made with Israel. Second, it was a reminder of the LORD stopping the water from flowing down the Jordan in order for the people to cross on dry ground.

### d) Each Man to Remember the Stones (4:7b)

Each man was to remember the stones. Verse 7b. *“So these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever.”* (4:7b)

This memorial was to be permanent. Forever. At the Gilgal camp in Israel today, stones are everywhere. Over the years, stones have been brought in to build walls and fences. There are large stones and small stones of every natural shape and size. Nevertheless, twelve stones are still there ordered in two rows of six – stones of various sizes.



*Twelve Stones as a Memorial at Gilgal*

### e) Each Man Retrieved a Stone (4:8)

As directed by Joshua, each man retrieved a stone. Verse 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.”* (4:8)

The men had completed their divine work, directed by the LORD. The twelve stones were in the camp of the Nation of Israel for the first night in the Promised Land – out of the water and onto the land. But the events at the river were not complete.

## 2. Stones for a Memorial in the Jordan (4:9-11)

### a) At the Feet of the Priests (4:9)

Back down in the river bed stones for a memorial in the Jordan River were needed. Joshua set twelve stones at the feet of the priest for that purpose. Verse 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.”* (4:9)

What does *“to this day”* mean? It means that when the book of Joshua was mostly completed by either writer, the stones were still in place in the Jordan River, just as Joshua had placed them. It does not mean that we can go find them today. The wear of the water, sands, and silt, have surely worn them away or the strength of the moving water has shuffled them along. No one has cast their eyes on them in centuries.

### b) In the Middle of the Jordan (4:10-11)

While all of this was happening, the priests were still standing in the middle of the Jordan. Verse 10a. *“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.”* (4:10a)

Faithful to the command of the LORD and the command of Joshua, the priests stood at their assigned location.

#### (1) The People Crossed (4:10b)

How long did the priests stand in the middle of the river? Until the people crossed. Verse 10b. *“And the people hurried and crossed....”* (4:10b)

The people did not take their time to cross the river. The writer said they “*hurried*.” It means they crossed *in a rush*. The first time we see the word “*hurried*” in any written English literature is in the works of Shakespeare. Surely, he did not coin the word but he was the earliest to write in on paper. To him, it meant *rapid, or to make haste*. We know there were over 601,000 men to cross the river that day not including women and children. None of the families of the two and a half tribes that stayed on the east side of the river crossed. Nevertheless, it was a lot of people and it took some time for the people to cross. Yet, the priests stood with the Ark in the middle of the river bed.

#### (2) The Priests Crossed (4:11)

Finally, after the people crossed, after Joshua placed the stones in the middle of the river, it was time for the priests to cross. Verse 11. “... *and when all the people had finished crossing, the ark of the LORD and the priests crossed before the people.*” (4:11)

When the Scripture says, “*and the priests crossed before the people*” it simply means the people saw the priests come out of the river bed with the Ark. It does not mean the priests crossed before the people crossed.

#### C. The Order of the Crossing of the Jordan River (4:12-17)

##### a) Two and a Half Tribes First (4:12-13)

From the crossing of the Jordan River, to the memorial stones of the Jordan River, we come to the order of the crossing of the Jordan River. In typical Hebrew style of writing, which often seems strange to the English reader, the author told us about the crossing of the Jordan River. Then he circled back and told more details about the crossing with memorial stones. Now he circles back again to tell us about the order of the crossing. He starts with the two and a half tribes first that struck a deal with Moses and it caused the order of the movement of the camp caravan to be changed for this journey. Verse 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;*<sup>13</sup> *about 40,000 equipped for war, crossed for battle before the LORD to the desert plains of Jericho.*” (4:12-13)

Normally, the tribe of Judah led the caravan as the nation moved from place to place. But moving across the Jordan, the men of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh took the lead crossing the Jordan River. If you will remember, these three groups were enamored by the land taken from Kings Sihon and Og on the east side of the Jordan River. They wanted that land and they asked Moses if it could be their inheritance. Moses agreed on one condition. The families of the men would stay behind on their new land and the men would cross over and fight with their tribesmen until all the Promised Land on the west side of the Jordan was captured. They agreed. With the crossing of the Jordan River, these men did not have families to worry about in the caravan. Therefore, they were placed in the front of the line, first to cross over the river and they did so in battle array. The word “*array*” simply means the order that the men would line up to fight in a battle if it came to be. It was a strategic arrangement of the fighters and weapons for the purposes of protecting the nation they were leading. As the text says, there were about 40,000 men ready to fight. According to Numbers chapter 26, Reuben had 43,730 men, Gad had 40,500 men, and the half-tribe of Manasseh would be 26,350 men. Obviously, the total of all those men was more than 40,000. However, the text was specific that only about 40,000 men were equipped for war. That did not mean the other men were not there, they surely were. It only meant all the extra men were not equipped for war.

##### b) The Exaltation of Joshua (4:14)

Then the writer tells us about the exaltation of Joshua on the day of the crossing. Verse 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.*” (4:14)

With all we know about Moses as a leader and Joshua as a leader, this verse is true. Frankly, the people revered both men. In reality, Joshua had fewer problems as a leader than those of Moses. And, Joshua served as the leader of the nation ten more years than Moses did.

#### c) The Priests Come from the Jordan Last (4:15-17)

With this last circle of information from the writer coming around, we discover that the priests come up from the Jordan last. Verse 15. *“Now the LORD said to Joshua,<sup>16</sup> “Command the priests who carry the ark of the testimony that they come up from the Jordan.”<sup>17</sup> So Joshua commanded the priests, saying, “Come up from the Jordan.”* (4:15-17)

The crossing was over. We do not know how long it took. We know when the waters heaped up thirty miles north of the crossing, but when did the heap of water begin to flow back down? Water generally moves from zero to seven miles an hour. This all depends on the slope and roughness of the channel. At seven miles an hour, it would have taken more than four hours for the water to return to the crossing location as it was before it stopped. Did it take that long?

#### D. The Water of the Crossing of the Jordan (4:18)

Here is what the writer has to say about the water of the crossing of the Jordan. Verse 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.”* (4:18)

Before this passage, we asked the question, “When did the heap of water begin to flow back down?” In this passage, we hear that as soon as the priests stepped out of the river banks and up past where the river had overflowed because of the seasonal rains, that the water returned as it was before. This is a little but significant miracle that hardly anyone notices. With the water being heaped up thirty miles north, the timing to let that water loose had to be hours before so that it filled in the river just as the priests’ feet left the area at the exact moment, and it had to start moving their way long before the stones were gathered for Gilgal and the stones were set as a memorial in the middle of the river, and the order to call the priests to come out of the river, and the priest’s obedience in actually stepping out of the river was complete. Impossible for man. An easy task for the LORD of all creation.

#### E. The Day of the Crossing of the Jordan River (4:19-24)

##### 1. Nisan 10<sup>th</sup> (4:19)

But the writer was not through. More needed to be told about the day of the crossing of the Jordan River. Therefore, the writer needed to make another circle through the events of the day. Verse 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.”* (4:19)

The crossing started on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan and it ended on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan with the nation camped at the *“eastern edge of Jericho.”* The nation was at the eastern foot of its first conquest. The people of Jericho could see them from the windows in the walls surrounding their city. Perhaps Rahab could see the camp out her window, but we do not know that for a fact. But if she could, the scarlet thread the spies gave her would be easy to see as the people of Israel circled the city each day as we will learn about soon.

##### 2. The Memorial at Gilgal (4:20)

The camp was in place and so was the memorial at Gilgal. Verse 20. *“Those twelve stones which they had taken from the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal.”* (4:20)

Notice that the twelve men simply carried the stones and delivered them to the camp. Joshua set them up. He ordered them. He placed them as a memorial that would last.

### 3. The Reason for the Memorial (4:21-24)

#### a) Questions from the Children (4:21-22)

Finally, the writer returns to state again the reason for the memorial. The reason involved two things, the questions from the children and the answer for the children. First, the question. Verse 21. *“He said to the sons of Israel, “When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, ‘What are these stones?’<sup>22</sup> then you shall inform your children, saying, ‘Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground.’” (4:21-22)*

The first part of the reply to the question about the stones is simply, *“Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground.”*

#### b) Answer for the Children (4:23-24)

Second, we come to the complete answer for the children. Verse 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;<sup>24</sup> 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.” (4:23-24)*

The important part of this passage that has not been spoken before is *“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.”* Do you remember the testimony of Rahab? Do you remember that the people of Jericho had heard about the crossing of the Red Sea and were fearful of the LORD God who protected Israel? Can you imagine when the people of Jericho looked over their walls to see in the distance the dry river bed of the Jordan and all the mass of people coming across? What Jericho had been afraid of for forty years had happened in their back yard, on the east side of their city. Rahab had already testified that the city knew they could not stand against the nation of Israel and their LORD. Surely, the hearts of the people of Jericho shook in disbelief when they saw the events of the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. It would not take long. The news would spread. Soon, all the people of the earth would know the power of the mighty hand of the LORD, and fear Him. This testimony in this lesson is for you today. Do you understand the powered of the mighty hand of the LORD? Do you fear Him? You should.