

JOSHUA

10. What article of tabernacle furniture was to go before the people?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 4

- Vv. 1- 9 *The memorials of the crossing.* The purpose for the selecting of twelve men from among the tribes of Israel was finally demonstrated as each man took a stone out of the midst of the Jordan River and carried it to the western shore. Joshua himself set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the Ark of the Covenant had stood.
- Vv. 10-18 *The crossing completed.* Joshua was shown to be God's appointed leader as the crossing was successfully completed. After all the people had crossed the Jordan, the priests themselves came up out of the Jordan. When the priests came up out of the Jordan River valley, the water returned to its place and flowed over all its banks as it had done before.
- Vv. 19-24 *The purpose of the memorial.* God did not perform a miracle simply to make the expedition of the Israelites an easy matter for them. What He did was accomplished in order that the Israelites might fear God and all the people of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is mighty (v. 24).

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *The fathers are teachers.* God had commanded Joshua to select twelve men from among the tribes of Israel to bear stones up out of the Jordan valley. These were

to be set up as a memorial of the crossing of the Jordan River. God foresaw the day when their children would say, "What mean ye by these stones?" (v. 6). The ancestors of the Israelites would be able to remind them that this was a memorial of God's great miracle in allowing Israel to cross the Jordan on dry ground.

2. *God honors His leaders.* When Joshua did what God had commanded him to do, the Lord magnified him in the sight of all Israel. As a result of this honoring of Joshua, the people of Israel feared him as they had feared Moses all the days of his life. If Joshua had not kept God's commandment, he would not have had this honor. Similar honor will be given to all of God's servants as they live lives of faithfulness for Him.
3. *All men should know about God.* The memorial which the people of Israel erected near Gilgal on the west bank of the Jordan reminded Israel of how God had blessed them. It also stood as a testimony to all the people in the earth that the hand of the Lord is mighty (v. 24).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Memorials of the Crossing 4:1-9

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

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

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.

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 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 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?

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.

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.

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.

1. *How long did Israel take to cross the Jordan?* 4:1

The Scripture does not tell us how many hours were consumed in crossing the last natural barrier which stood between the people of Israel and the land God had promised to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and their descendants. Since the people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the month and observed the Passover at the regular time—the fourteenth day of the first month, the month Abib—and some six days were evidently spent in waiting, the people must have moved across rapidly. The priests stood throughout the time, and we are led to believe the hundreds of thousands of Israelites were moved

across the river in a period of no more than several hours. Certainly they did not take a number of days to make this last journey.

2. *Who were the men Joshua commanded the people to take?* 4:2

The men mentioned here are evidently the men referred to in 3:12. Joshua gave the people some time to select the men from each of the tribes. At the time the initial order was given, he did not indicate the reason for their being selected. After they had crossed Jordan, the reason was made clear. They were to carry stones from the bed of the Jordan River to a point on the west bank where a memorial of Israel's miraculous crossing of the river was to be erected.

3. *How is the importance of the taking of twelve stones exemplified?* 4:3

The main point of the story of their crossing the Jordan is their taking twelve stones with them from the bed of the river to the opposite side to serve as a memorial. To set forth the importance of this fact as a divine appointment, the command of God to Joshua is mentioned first of all (verses 2, 3); then the repetition of this command by Joshua to the men appointed for the work (verses 4-7); and lastly, the carrying out of the instructions (verse 8). The people were not to erect a memorial to remind them of the greatness of one of their own leaders, but they were to be reminded of God's great miraculous blessing upon them.

4. *What other stones served as monuments in Bible history?*

Stones were quite often used as monuments. Some of the more famous ones are these:

1. Jacob (Genesis 28:18) going to Haran
2. Jacob (Genesis 35:14) returning from Haran

3. Jacob and Laban (Genesis 31:45-47) as they parted
4. Samuel at Ebenezer (I Samuel 7:12) when the Philistines were defeated

They were sometimes consecrated with oil (Genesis 28:18). At other times, they seem merely to be set up with very little ceremony.

5. *When was the commandment given to the men?* 4:5

Although the twelve men had been selected earlier it is apparent that the commandment for them to pick up the stones was not given to them until the waters of the Jordan were stopped and the people had crossed on dry land. They must have stood about in amazement wondering what their assignment was to be as the crossing proceeded and there was nothing for them to do. When the commandment was finally given, they each must have eagerly selected a choice stone. One can imagine how they carried the stones with alacrity when they moved out to the western side of the Jordan River.

6. *What was the purpose of the memorial?* 4:7

The memorial served a didactic purpose. God was looking into future ages and making preparation for later generations. The Israelite fathers were responsible for the training and education of their children. The memorial stones would be a visible reminder of God's great guidance of Israel. The inquisitive nature of children would incline them to ask about these stones whenever they saw them. The fathers were to be prepared to recount what happened at the Jordan as the people crossed over the dry river bed.

7. *Did Joshua set up a second memorial?* 4:9

In addition to the twelve stones set up by the twelve men, Joshua set up twelve stones for a memorial on the spot where the feet of the priests had stood as they bore the Ark of the Covenant. There is nothing to warrant our calling this statement in question. We cannot set it aside as a gloss, either because nothing is said about any

divine command to set up these stones, or because of the opinion that such a memorial would have failed to achieve its object. Some say it could not possibly have remained, but would very speedily have been washed away by the stream. The water would reach where the priests stood only in flood times, and for the rest of the year this memorial would be high on dry ground. It would appear from 4:9 that two sets of stones were set up. Joshua, following the spirit of the Divine direction, caused a second set to be erected in the middle of the river on the spot where the priests had stood. Water would reach the spot only at flood times, and the memorial would thus be enabled to stand for a number of years. Some have supposed the verse to be an interpolation of later date; but, as it occurs in all manuscripts and as it is expressly stated in the Septuagint and Vulgate that this was a different transaction from the other, we must accept it as such.

The Crossing Completed 4:10-18

10 For the priests which bare 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 it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over, the ark of the Lord passed over, and the priests, in the presence of the people.

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 prepared for war passed over before the Lord unto battle, to the plains of Jericho.

14 And 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 And the Lord spake unto Joshua, saying,

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

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

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 onto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before.

8. *In what way was Joshua commanded by Moses? 4:10*

These words do not refer to any special instructions which Moses had given to Joshua with reference to the crossing, for no such instructions are to be found in the Pentateuch. Such directives cannot be inferred from Numbers 27:23; Deuteronomy 3:28; or Deuteronomy 31:23. The words simply affirm that Joshua carried out all the commands which the Lord had given him, in accordance with the charge which he received from Moses at the time when he was first called. Of course, Moses himself was not present for the crossing of the Jordan, but all of Joshua's work was done in fulfillment of Moses' appointment of Joshua as his successor. It was Moses' wish for Joshua to succeed him as the leader of God's people. God had sealed this appointment by his marvelous encouragement to Joshua. The fact that Joshua was walking in faithfulness which was typified by Moses had been demonstrated and verified by the miracle of the stopping of the Jordan's waters.

9. *Why is reference made to both the Ark and the priests?*
4:11

The priests were subordinate to the Ark, because, it was through the medium of the Ark of the Lord that the miracle of drying up the river had been effected. It was not by the priests but by Jehovah, the Almighty God, who was enthroned upon the Ark, that the waters were commanded to stand still. The Ark did not move by its own power. It was carried by the priests, and so both the priests and the Ark are mentioned as passing over the Jordan River.

10. *In what way did the eastern tribes pass over as Moses spoke to them?* 4:12

Once again the reader of the Scripture is not to be confused by the mentioning of Moses' speaking to the eastern tribes. He was not present when the crossing occurred, but he had given specific instructions to the three tribes who wanted to settle east of the Jordan River. His conversation with them is recorded in Numbers 32:20, 27, 28. They had agreed to go over with the other tribes and engage in the battles of conquest. When the conquest had been completed they were granted permission to return to Gilead and to settle there.

11. *Did all the armed men of the eastern tribes cross the Jordan River?* 4:13

Only about one-third of the armed men of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh crossed over to the plains of Jericho. The remaining seventy thousand men who were twenty years of age or older stayed behind to take care of the women and children who were not required to cross over into the western part of Canaan. The total of men in these three tribes can be calculated from the census which was recorded in the twenty-sixth chapter of the book of Numbers.

12. *In what way did the people fear Joshua?* 4:14

The people of Israel were not afraid of Joshua. They had not been afraid of Moses. They had respected him. Josephus says when Moses died the people wept bitterly. The old men knew what a great leader he had been, and they knew that they would miss his helpful leadership. The younger people wept because they were to be deprived of the privilege of being closely associated with a great leader. The people had this same kind of respect for Joshua as God magnified him by directing the crossing in such a magnificent way.

13. *Was Joshua in charge of the priests?* 4:16

When Moses selected Joshua to be his successor, God told Moses that Joshua would stand before Eleazar, the priest, who would ask counsel for him after the judgment of the Urim before the Lord. God said that Joshua would go out and come in at the word of the high priest. Moses himself had never been required to make such inquiries of Aaron, his brother. Joshua was in this way subordinate to Eleazar, the son of Aaron. The specific command for the priests to come out of the Jordan, however, was an unusual request and Joshua was so ordered by God.

14. *How far did the flood waters reach?* 4:18

The Jordan flows through a bed known as the Ghor. It would be eight miles wide at some points. This region is normally covered with trees and reeds, and the greenery presents a striking contrast to the sandy slopes which bound it on both sides. In many places this strip of vegetation occupies a deeper portion of the lower valley. As a result, one might distinguish three different banks—the upper or outer banks which form the first slope of the great valley, the lower of middle banks embracing the strip of land which is covered with vegetation, and the true banks of the river's bed. The floods seldom reach beyond

the lower line which is covered with vegetation. On some occasions the flood may reach out beyond this line of vegetation. One traveler did find the river so swollen when he visited it that it filled the bed to the very brim and covered all the ground where the bushes grew. The rise of water takes place at the time of harvest in April and at the close of the rainy season after the snow has been melted upon Mount Hermon. These melting snows fill the Sea of Galilee until it reaches its greatest height and then the excess water flows off into the Jordan to make it a full stream as it plunges down to the Dead Sea. At such a time, the river can not be waded even at its shallowest fords; whereas this is possible in the dry season when the water is low. Only by swimming could one cross it, and then hardly at all. The spies may have crossed the Jordan and returned in this manner, but the thousands of Israelites with their women and children could not cross in this fashion. For this reason, God cut off the water and allowed them to cross over on the rocky, dry river bed. After the people crossed, He allowed the water to flow out over its usual normal banks, out across the green Ghor and perhaps even to the farthest extents of the sandy slopes which may have been eight miles in width in places.

The Purpose of the Memorial 4:19-24

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.

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

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 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 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 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.

15. On what day did the people cross the Jordan? 4:19

The month Abib was the first month of the Jewish calendar. In latter times this month was called Nisan. It was in this month that the Passover fell as God had given directions for its institution (Exodus 12:18). This first month of the Jewish calendar corresponds to the March and April of the Julian calendar, being the latter part of the month of March and the first part of the month of April. The crossing occurred at the end of the forty years of wilderness wandering and would thus be in the forty-first year after the people left Egypt.

16. Where was Gilgal? 4:19

Gilgal was the first camp established by the Israelites on the west side of the Jordan River in the land of Canaan. The place received its name from the events which are recorded in chapter 5 of Joshua. The spot must not have been far from Jericho, and it is called by the name of Geliloth in Joshua 18:17. This was one of the points on Samuel's circuit as he moved about when he judged Israel (I Samuel 7:16). It was here that Agag, the king of the Amalekites, was slain (I Samuel 15:33). At least two other places in Israel bear this same name. One was some four miles from Bethel and Shiloh (II Kings 2:1, 2; 4:38). Another is often referred to as a regal Gilgal since a king lived there. This one is mentioned in Joshua 12:23.

17. *What was the chief end of the miracle?* 4:22

The miracle effectually confirmed the authority of Joshua in the eyes of Israel. The people feared him all the days of his life as they had feared Moses. The immediate end of the miracle, however, was to enable the people to cross the Jordan quickly and easily. The indirect benefit was that the government of Joshua was established. Another benefit also revealed to the Canaanites the omnipotence of the God of Israel. The miracle also would serve as an impulse to the Israelites to fear the Lord their God always (Exodus 14:4, 18; 6:6; see also Exodus 3:19; 6:1; 14:31).

18. *What was the purpose of the memorial?* 4:24

The twelve stones were to be a sign in Israel. They were to serve as a memorial of the miraculous crossing of the Jordan to all succeeding generations.

The purpose of the memorial was really twofold:

1. That the people of the earth might know God
2. That Israel might fear God and know these truths:
 - a. The Lord's power is unlimited
 - b. The Lord's power would be used for them
 - c. Their leader, Joshua, was working under God

Although Israel was not commissioned as a nation of evangelists, they were to be concerned for foreign people; and this memorial not only was to remind the Israelites of God's power but also to help other nations to know God.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 4

1. How many men did Joshua select to carry the memorial stones?
2. What were the names of the three eastern tribes who crossed over Jordan with the main force of Israel?

3. What day of the month was it when they crossed Jordan?
4. In what month was the day of the crossing?
5. What was the name of the place where Israel first camped west of Jordan?
6. What was the purpose of the memorial for all people?
7. What was the purpose of the memorial for Israel?
8. Did Joshua put up a second memorial?
9. How many stones did Joshua put in the memorial which he erected where the priests stood?
10. Where did the men who carried stones out of the Jordan set up their memorial?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 5

Vv. 1- 9 *The covenant of circumcision.* The generation of Israelites who crossed over into Canaan had not been circumcised on the eighth day after their births in the wilderness. As a result of this neglect, it was necessary for them to keep this perpetual covenant with God as they entered into a new phase of their lives under His leadership. This was done at the camp, and the place was named Gilgal signifying the rolling away of the reproach of Egypt from them.

Vv. 10-12 *The keeping of the Passover.* On the fourth day after they crossed the Jordan, the people kept the first Passover to be observed in the Promised Land. It must have been a glorious occasion as the people renewed their vows to God. After the people were situated in the land, the manna which had come to them each day during their wilderness wandering was discontinued.