

Joshua 4

Chapter 3 described the actual crossing of the Jordan River, while chapter 4 describes the commemoration of that crossing.

When the entire nation of Israel had crossed the Jordan River, what did the Lord tell Joshua to do (vv. 2-3)? The Lord told Joshua to direct 12 men, previously chosen (cf. 3:12), to carry 12 stones from the bed of the river to the place of the first night's encampment. This memorial celebrated the crossing of the Israelite nation over the dry riverbed of the Jordan. It was important that Israel never forget this great miracle. So that the Israelites would remember how God acted on their behalf on this historic day, God had them erect a permanent 12-stone memorial.

What did Joshua tell the twelve men to do (vv. 4-7)? They were to return to the middle of the riverbed and each one was to bring back one stone. These stones would be a vivid reminder (a memorial) of God's work of deliverance (cf. v. 24) and an effective means for the Israelites to teach their young (vv. 6-7; cf. vv. 21-24).¹ **What kinds of remembrances or memorials can we use to teach our children?**

What did the twelve men do next (v. 8)? The response of the 12 men was immediate and unquestioning. They could well have feared reentering the Jordan. After all, how long would it stay dry? When would the water start to flow again? Whatever fears they may have had were put aside and they unhesitatingly obeyed God's instructions.²

What did Joshua do with the twelve stones (v. 9)? An alternative translation suggests that Joshua set up a second pile of twelve stones in the middle of the river.

What did the priests carrying the Ark do during this time (vv. 10-11)? The priests and the ark remained in the riverbed while the people hurried across (v. 10; cf. 3:17). As soon as all the people had crossed and the special mission for the memorials was completed, the priests left the riverbed—they were the first ones in and the last ones out—and resumed their position at the head of the people (vv. 11, 15-17). Immediately the Jordan resumed its flow (v. 18).³

What did the men of the Transjordanian tribes do (vv. 12-13)? Warriors from the two and one-half tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh crossed the Jordan with the other Israelites. But not all the warriors from these tribes went with their brethren across the Jordan. Only 40,000 of the 110,000 did (cf. 4:13 and Numbers 26:7, 18, 34). The remainder evidently stayed in Transjordan. God allowed men who had built a new house but had not dedicated it, men who had planted a vineyard but had not put it to use, men who were engaged to a woman and had not married her, and men who were afraid and fainthearted to be exempt from going into war (Deuteronomy. 20:5-8).⁴

What else did the Lord do on that day (v. 14)? This miraculous crossing is what God used to exalt Joshua so that the Israelites revered him like they had previously revered Moses. And this respect continued throughout Joshua's entire lifetime.⁵

What was the next order the Lord gave to Joshua (vv. 15-16)? Then the Lord said to Joshua, "*Command the priests carrying the ark of the Testimony to come up out of the Jordan.*"

When the priests came up out of the river carrying the Ark in response to Joshua's order, what happened (v. 18)? *"And the priests came up out of the river carrying the ark of the covenant of the Lord. No sooner had they set their feet on the dry ground than the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and ran at flood stage as before."*

Where did the Israelites camp and what did Joshua do (vv. 19-20)? Joshua led the people to Gilgal, their first encampment in Canaan, about two miles from Jericho. There the 12 stones ... taken out of the Jordan were set up,⁶

What directive did Joshua give to the Israelites (vv. 21-23)? In addition to being a place of worship, the purpose of the stones was clearly designed as a teaching moment: **how were the future generations to know what the stones meant?** The answer is clear. Parents were to teach God's ways and works to their children (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4-7). A Jewish father was not to send his inquisitive child to a Levite for answers to his questions. The father was to answer them himself. The stones were a reminder to Israel for generations to come that it was God who brought them through the Jordan (cf. vv. 6-7) just as He had taken their fathers through the Red Sea.

What were some of the Lord's additional purposes in leading the Israelites through the Jordan River (v. 24)? Besides serving as a visual aid for parental instruction of children, the memorial stones had a broader purpose: *"that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful."* All the peoples of the earth included the Canaanites. Just as they had heard about the Red Sea crossing and the defeat of Sihon and Og (2:10)

As the families of Israel spent their first night in the land, their hearts may well have been filled with uncertainty and fear. The mountains rising steeply to the west looked foreboding. But then the people looked at the twelve stones taken out of the Jordan and were reminded that God had done something great for them that day. Surely they could trust Him for the days ahead.⁷

The purpose of the stones that were taken from the Jordan River (cf. v. 8) memorialized the faithfulness and the power of Yahweh on behalf of His people (v. 24; cf. Exodus 14:4, 18), and they caused God's people to fear Him (v. 24; cf. Exodus 14:31). "Fear the Lord" is the most common expression calling for faith in God in the Old Testament.⁸

One can imagine what it must have been like for the Israelites to stand on the riverbank, watching the hurrying torrent covering up their path, and then lifting their eyes to look at the opposite side where they had stood that morning. There was no returning now. A new and exciting chapter in their history had begun.⁹

¹ Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua" in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 335.

² Ibid., 336.

³ Ibid..

⁴ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Joshua, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 42.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua" in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 336.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Joshua, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 43.

⁹ Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua" in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 336.