

Joshua

The LORD is Salvation

Chapter 4 *The Two Sets of Twelve Stones*

4:1-3 After the Israelite nation completed the crossing of the Jordan, the LORD told Joshua that the twelve men, one chosen from each of the twelve tribes ^{Joshua 3:12}, were to pick up a stone from the middle of the dry river bed, where the Levitical priests were standing with the ark ^{Joshua 3:17}. Then the men were to carry the stones to Gilgal, the site of their campsite that night ^{v.19}.

God had instructed Moses they were to "coat the [large stones] with plaster" Deuteronomy 27:2.

4:4-5 Joshua called together the twelve chosen men and he relayed the plan defined by the LORD. The men were picked by the tribes, but as the leader, Joshua "appointed" (approved) them.

Note the implied large stone size: the stones had to be carried on the shoulders of the men.

Earlier, Joshua had instructed the Israelites to "not go near [the ark]" Joshua 3:4; however, here he told the twelve chosen men to "go over before the ark of the Lord" v.5.

4:6-7 Joshua explained: the twelve stones (representing the twelve tribes of Israel) would serve as a "sign" to future generations of the power of the LORD's presence ^{Exodus 12:26-27, Psalm 114:7}, because He stopped the flow of the Jordan River when the "ark of the covenant" ^{Exodus 25:10-22} "crossed the Jordan" to allow His people to cross on dry ground. The memorial would be an everlasting sign of the legacy of God's faithfulness ^{Exodus 10:2} and the people's obedience.

Physical remembrances of Israel's 12 tribes were also important prior to the Jordan crossing.

Moses set up a twelve stone altar at Mt. Sinai ^{Exodus 24:4} to confirm the Mosaic Covenant and there were twelve stones fastened on the breastpiece of the high priest ^{Exodus 28:21}.

4:8 The twelve chosen men carried out the instructions from the LORD through Joshua: they carried stones on their shoulders ^{v.5} from the ark to Gilgal, where Joshua would later set them up ^{v.20}.

4:9 This verse is the only one that addresses the second set of twelve stones: it clearly states that Joshua set up a different set of twelve stones in the middle of the river, at the feet of the priests (so the stones were under the flood stage water as soon as the priests left the river bed ^{v.18}).

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The verse declares these stones are still there ^{Genesis 35:20}, while a later verse ^{v.20} reveals that the stones carried by the twelve men were set up by Joshua at their encampment site at Gilgal.

4:10-13 The people, led by Joshua, carried out every instruction from the LORD God, with the forty thousand warriors from the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh crossing first, then all of the people from the other nine and one-half tribes crossed over, and finally the priests carried the ark to the western bank. Note the influence Moses continued to have.

A key message for Jews & Christians is given here: unity in the faith ^{Psalms 133:1, Romans 15:5-6}.

According to the 2nd census ^{Numbers 26:7,18,34}, Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh had 110,580 men available (20 years+ ^{Numbers 1:3}), but they only sent 40,000 ^{v.13} across the Jordan into the PL with Joshua. However, the Lord had "commanded" them to send "all your able-bodied men, armed for battle, [to] cross over ahead of the other Israelites" ^{Deuteronomy 3:18}.

4:14 The LORD completed the promise He made to Joshua prior to crossing the Jordan ^{Joshua 3:7}: to exalt Joshua before all of Israel. In fact, He promised that Joshua would be revered just as Moses had been revered; however, Joshua would face much less resistance (grumbling) to his leadership ^{Joshua 9:18} than Moses received ^{Exodus 15:24, 16:2, 17:3, Numbers 14:2, 16:41}.

4:15-18 These verses describe the details of the LORD'S instructions about the priests to Joshua. Joshua commanded the priests to complete their task by coming "up out of the Jordan" River. The priests followed the orders, and as they stepped onto the west bank of the Jordan, the river water began to flow once again ^{Exodus 14:27-28}, at flood stage, just as before ^{Joshua 3:15}.

4:19 On the tenth day of the first month, Joshua led the Israelites from the Jordan to camp at Gilgal. The tenth day of the first month (the 10th of *Nisan*) is the day each man picks a lamb for his family in preparation for Passover ^{Exodus 12:3}. It had been 40 years since the actual Passover. The first month (March-April) was called *Abib* by pre-exilic and *Nisan* by post-exilic Jews.

4:20-24 Joshua stacked up the twelve stones ^{Deuteronomy 27:2} near their encampment site at Gilgal. He then reiterated ^{v.6-7} that the purpose of the monument was to be a legacy for the generations to come, in order that they would understand God's provision at both the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan River (on dry ground ^{Exodus 14:22}). Also, throughout all time, "all peoples of the earth" ^{1 Kings 8:60} would reverence God's power ^{Psalms 44:3, 106:8} and presence ^{Revelation 20:11}.

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The Stone Memorials: Secondary Meanings

Joshua explained that the twelve stones at *Gilgal* were a sign of *God's* provision for the Israelite nation ^{v.21-24}, but they can also be seen as a representation of the twelve tribes that crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land; therefore, the twelve stones Joshua set-up in the middle of the river could be seen to represent the Israelites who died in the desert, because of their lack of faith and trust, and were not allowed to cross the Jordan

These powerful images are also a wonderful picture of baptism: Paul explained ^{Romans 6:1-4}, in the process of baptism, death to sin is symbolized by being under the water (like the set of stones in the middle of the river) and coming out of the water represents new life in the resurrection of Christ (like the set of stones at *Gilgal*) (like "living stones" ^{1 Peter 2:4-7}). Jesus himself even associated his suffering and death with an aspect of baptism ^{Luke 12:50}.

A second possible relationship between the crossing and baptism involves John the Baptist. John baptized Jesus at a place called "Bethany on the other side of the Jordan" ^{John 1:28-36}; however, some translations name the place *Bethabara* or *Beth Barah* (House of Passage). If this is an accurate translation, then John was baptizing at the actual site of the crossing. Consequently, when he said to the Pharisees and the Sadducees: "*I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.*" ^{Matthew 3:7-9}, John may have been actually referring to the stones in the stone memorial at *Gilgal* set up by Joshua.