

Israel Remembers God's Deeds

Devotional Reading: Luke 8:35–39

Background Scripture: Exodus 14; Joshua 3:1–4:24

Today's Scripture: Joshua 4:14–24

I. God's Proclamation

Joshua 4:14

14 On 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.

14a. This half-verse fulfills an earlier promise from *the Lord* to “magnify [Joshua] in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee” (Joshua 3:7). The Hebrew word translated *magnified* carries the idea of becoming in some way “greater.” The Lord’s exaltation of this newly installed leader gives complete confidence to *all Israel*. Although the Israelites belong to distinct tribes, they are united as one nation; they all put their trust in Joshua as their leader.

14b. The underlying Hebrew word translated *feared* can mean either feelings of terror or reverential respect. *Moses* had led the Israelites through the Red Sea and into the wilderness, and the people showed him reverential respect. Now, Joshua is something of a “new Moses”—someone in the vein of Moses who would lead the Israelites. At this point, Joshua has only led the people across the Jordan River and barely into the promised land. But having just experienced a miracle, they obey and respect him as they did

Moses. Their future as a nation depends on their obedience to Joshua, the Lord’s appointed leader.

II. God's Provision

Joshua 4:15–18

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

15. As the era of Joshua’s leadership continues, *the Lord* is again communicating His will for the new leader of the Israelites. Indeed, the Lord continues to do so throughout the book (compare Joshua 1:1–9; 3:7–8; 4:1–3; 5:2, 9; 6:2). *Joshua* cannot claim ignorance regarding his knowledge of the Lord’s commands.

16–17. The *ark* is a rectangular wooden box, overlaid with gold, that contains the

stone tablets of the law that were given to Moses. It serves as the focal point of tabernacle worship because it is the location for God's presence and revelation for the Israelites. *Priests* from the tribe of Levi are responsible for carrying the ark through the wilderness and for taking care of the various vessels of the tabernacle.

The ark is referred to by several names in Scripture, including "the ark of God" (1 Samuel 3:3) and "the ark of the covenant" (Joshua 3:3; etc.). The designation, the *ark of the testimony*, emphasizes the testimony of God's covenant promises to His people. The testimony can refer to the actual stone tablets inscribed by God, given to Moses, and housed in the ark. The ark and its contents symbolize the relationship between God and the Israelites, reminding the people of His presence. As Joshua and the Israelites cross the Jordan River and enter the land of Canaan, it is crucial that they remember God's promises and prioritize their obedience to His word.

18. *The priests* in charge of carrying the *ark* are both the first ones to set foot on the Jordan River's dry riverbed and the last to finish the crossing. The detail that *the waters of Jordan . . . flowed over all his banks, as they did before* indicates that the river was at the flood stage in the spring. These details and others suggest that the absence of a water obstacle is not a result of natural occurrence such as a drought; God's power created the pathway.

III. God's Promises

Joshua 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.

19. Our conclusion in the previous verse that the crossing occurred in *the first month* is confirmed. The further specification that it is *the tenth day* of that month recalls that the Lord had instructed the enslaved Israelites to prepare for Passover observance on that day.

The name of the month under consideration is given as "Abib" in Exodus 13:4; 23:15; 34:18; and Deuteronomy 16:1. This month corresponds with late March and early April. Considering 1 Chronicles 12:15 allows us to see the connection between the exact month and day of the year, the river's water level (Joshua 4:18), and the fact that this is the time of a harvest (3:14–15).

There is more than one town named *Gilgal* in the Old Testament. One such town is about twenty miles northwest of Jericho. That is the Gilgal of 1 Samuel 7:16 and 2 Kings 2:1, so it is not the one mentioned here. *Gilgal* comes from a Hebrew word meaning "circle" or "rolling." The Lord designates this site on *the east border of Jericho* with this name because "this day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you" (Joshua 5:9).

20. Joshua had commanded twelve Israelites to collect *twelve stones*, one for

each tribe, from the *Jordan* riverbed as they passed through it. Previously, Joshua had arranged the stones in the riverbed where the priests were standing. Now, having crossed to the other side of the river, *Joshua* erects the stones as a monument to commemorate God's provision to cross the river. The Law of Moses prohibits the use of cut stones for constructing altars (Exodus 20:25). However, this directive is not a total prohibition on constructing monuments. The exact arrangement of the stones is unknown. But it is built in such a way that it would be visible to others so that they could also remember the Lord's mighty act of deliverance.

21–22. The content of these verses repeats Joshua's earlier words in Joshua 4:6–7, though the phrasing is slightly different here. *These stones* stand as a memorial for the benefit of future generations, symbolizing God's provision that enabled the people of *Israel* to cross the *Jordan* River *on dry land*. Additionally, this memorial would remind future generations that it was the one true God of Israel, not the fictitious pagan gods Baal or Asherah, who brought the people into the promised land.

23. This verse highlights some important points regarding the crossing of the *Jordan*. First, it emphasizes that it is made possible by the power of *the Lord*, not simply the result of a natural phenomenon. The Law of Moses sharply contrasts allegiance to *your God* with allegiance to "their gods" (examples: Deuteronomy 7:16, 25; 12:31; 20:18). It is the one true God who created a path through the river for the people to cross, not the fictitious gods of the peoples the Israelites came to conquer. The absolute power of the one true God has been—and will be—demonstrated time and again. During the creation of the world, God separated the waters from dry land. He has total control over the waters, the winds, and

all parts of creation. No body of water can oppose Him!

Second, this verse notes the parallel between the Israelites' crossing of the *Jordan* River and their ancestors' crossing of the *Red sea* some forty years earlier. The Lord has given this new generation of Israelites a way through the waters, as He did for the previous generation. This new generation is experiencing a "new Exodus" also marked by the crossing of waters—theirs is an exodus out of wilderness wanderings into the promised "land flowing with milk and honey."

24. This verse reveals God's plans and purposes for the memorial of stones. One purpose is to communicate to *all the people of the earth* about what the Lord has done for the Israelites. *The hand of the Lord* brought the Israelites out of enslavement and guided them to the land.

The phrase *the hand of the Lord* is anthropomorphic, which means attributing human characteristics. Scripture often refers to the Lord in terms of human features (examples: Deuteronomy 8:3; Psalm 18:15). These are to be taken figuratively since God does not have a physical body.

Second, the memorial is to be a tangible reminder for the Israelites to live in honor and obedience to the Lord. To *fear the Lord* means to live in reverence of the Lord and His will. This fear is not a sense of dread or terror; rather, it is respect and reverence based on the Lord's identity and faithfulness. Reverent fear forms the foundation for obedience to the Lord. This kind of fear is the beginning of both knowledge and wisdom.

Therefore, as the Israelites enter the land, they construct a memorial recognizing the Lord's sovereign strength—His mighty hand that had brought them thus far. Everyone in the land, whether Israelite or not, will come to know His strength firsthand.

Involvement Learning

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Into the Lesson

Finish the following sentences:

I know that others are a faithful source of support because . . .

An example from history of a faithful person is . . .

Unfaithful people hurt others by . . .

Write a definition of the word *faithful*.

God has been faithful to His people throughout history. In today's study, we'll see how the ancient Israelites responded to God's faithfulness.

Into the Word

Read Exodus 13:17–14:31 and Joshua 3–4 then answer the following questions for each passage.

Who led the crossing of the body of water?

Why did the Israelites need to cross that body of water?

In what ways did the Lord intervene in the crossing?

How did the Israelites demonstrate faith despite risk and danger?

What encouragement did the Israelite leader give before the crossing?

How did the Israelites commemorate or celebrate the successful crossing?

In what ways did God show faithfulness to His people?

Key Text

When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land.

—Joshua 4:21b–22

Into Life

We've studied how the Israelites created a stone memorial to celebrate God's faithfulness. Even though we may not have access to stones, we can still create our own "monument of memory" to celebrate God's work in our lives. Make a plan to remember God's acts of faithfulness.

Thought to Remember

Create reminders
of God's steadfast faithfulness!