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June 21, 2026

REMEMBERING GOD'S WORKS:

JOSHUA 3:14-4:9

Introductory Activity

Direct and Ask: Direct the group to page 28 of their Personal Study Guide and ask the question on the page: "What are some prominent memorials you can think of? Why are they significant, and what impact do they have on people today?"

Explain: Probably one of the places with the highest percentages of "memorials" in our nation is our capital. If you walk around the National Mall, you will find memorials to those who sacrificed to defend the country. From the grand WWII Memorial to the stark and stilling Vietnam Memorial, they each evoke emotions and memories. They also provide an opportunity to remind generations who did not live during those wars of those events and the sacrifices of previous generations.

Summarize and Transition: In today's lesson, we will learn about a great event in the history of Israel. In Joshua chapter 3, we learn that God gave Joshua his own Red Sea moment as the people crossed into the Promised Land. The Lord performed a great act that the nation would need to remember in the future. So, the Lord instructed Joshua to create a memorial of His great deeds. As we look at this passage, we can be reminded of God's power and the necessity of remembering and informing future generations.

To bring us up to speed, let's review and remember what's going on in the book of Joshua. In chapter 1, we learn that Moses, the long-time leader of the nation, has died. In his place, God commissions Joshua to be the leader. While Joshua had previously proven himself as Moses' capable aid and as a military leader, it appears that the man was lacking the confidence to lead. In response to these possible feelings, God repeatedly told Joshua to be strong and courageous. The people demonstrated their acceptance of Joshua as their new leader and agreed to follow him in the closing verses of chapter 1. Chapter 2 is an interlude in the story of Israel. The author takes us across the Jordan River and gives us a glimpse into the life of those who lived in the walled city of Jericho. This great city would be the first "obstacle" for the conquering Israelites. Chapter 2 reveals that the population was filled with terror of the approaching Israelite nation. One faithful woman protected two Israelite spies and received the promise of protection during the coming invasion. This woman, named Rahab, eventually became a part of the Israelite family and is an ancestor of Jesus. Today, we will look at chapters 3 and 4 and return our attention to God's people. In chapter 3, God tells the people to prepare themselves spiritually because he is going to do great things for them. Let's pick up and see what God has in store for the people.

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Joshua* (Preaching)
- *New American Commentary: Matthew* (NAC)
- Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Joshua (TOTC)

1. DRY GROUND (JOSH. 3:14-17)

Read (or have someone read) Joshua 3:14-17.

Explain: In this passage, we see the Nation's Great Commitment, The Lord's Great Act, and the Culminating Great Outcome.

Nation's Great Commitment: Our passage picks up in the middle of chapter 3. The first part of the chapter, though, prepares us for the event. Earlier in the chapter, we learned that the people of God had moved their camp to the very edge of the flooded Jordan River. Joshua instructed the people to prepare themselves spiritually. In verse 5, he said, "Consecrate yourselves, because the Lord will do wonders among you tomorrow." Let's remember the history of the people. Forty years before the parents and grandparents of these people had camped on the edge of the Promised Land. They learned of the greatness of the land and the greatness of its inhabitants from the 12 spies sent in by Moses. Ten of those spies had emphasized the greatness of the inhabitants and urged the nation to turn back. Two of those spies had emphasized the greatness of God and urged the people forward. The nation listened to the ten nay-sayers, resulting in God's judgment. Now, forty years later, the nation is camped yet again on the edge of the Promised Land, and one of the two God-focused spies now lead the nation. He tells the people to prepare themselves for a revelation of God's greatness.

Application and discussion: We must be prepared to experience the work of God. How can we prepare ourselves to experience the great work of God?

Explain: First, we prepare ourselves by living consecrated lives. The word consecrate is connected to the idea of holiness and separation from uncleanness. We will never experience the great works of God if we are not living holy lives. Second, we prepare ourselves by living committed lives.

The Israelites were camped next to a raging river over 100 feet wide. God told them they would cross the river. I am sure there were "logical" men in the group who put their "thinking caps" on and stared out at the river and began to discuss among themselves what God would have them do. But Joshua puts an end to all these "logical" ideas back in verse 13 when he tells them that God was going to "cut off" the water. He had also told them to break camp and follow the priest when they began to walk toward the river. In verse 14, we see that they did just that. They committed themselves to following the Lord's command. The second act of preparation to see the Lord's work is to commit to His commands. The Nation demonstrated its great commitment. If they had not, they would not have experienced God's great act. The same is true for us today. When God says go, we need to follow Him forward.

The Lord's Great Act: In verses 15-16, we see the Lord's Great Act. This is a three-part miracle. First, it is a **Miracle of Timing**. Verse 15 tells us that

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when the priests got to the Jordan, they did not stop. This was a sign of their great commitment. They did not stop; they just stepped into the water. At that exact moment, God acted. He did not act before they stepped into the water, and He did not wait for them to get waist-deep. However, I am not sure they knew God acted at that exact moment. To understand this, imagine a drone hovering over the priests. When they step into the water, it flies up and gives us a much broader view. Verse 16 tells us that about 15 miles upstream, the water began to pile up in a heap (NIV). Our drone turns and shows us the water beginning to pile up, but the priests are still standing in the water. Then slowly the flow of the water around them begins to lessen, and finally the last of it flows by as a trickle. This is the second part of the three-part miracle. **It was a Miracle of Stoppage.**

Application and Discussion: Before we look at the third part of this miracle, we need to take a moment and apply what we have learned so far. The Miracle of Timing and the Miracle of Stoppage can teach us several things about ourselves and God. Ask: Consider this miracle, what do you think it teaches us? (Allow time for discussion and use the information below to fill in group comments.)

First, we learn that **When God Says Go, He Does Not Mean Go Halfway.** The priests had been told that God would "cut off" the waters of the Jordan *when their feet were in the water*. This meant they had to step into the raging river before God would act. This is a picture for us. When God tells us to act, it might mean literally or spiritually stepping out in faith. Just as Peter would have never walked on water if he had not stepped out of the boat, the priests would never have experienced the miracle if they had not stepped into the water.

Second, we learn that **When God says He will Act, He Will** even if we do not see it at first. The priests had to stand in the river long enough for the water below God's "dam" to pass by. Sometimes we can be impatient. We know God's promises, but we look around and don't see immediate results, so we assume He is not acting. This is when we are tempted to act on our own. We begin building bridges or making rafts to get across our "rivers." Instead, we need to trust in God's promises.

Third, we see that **When God Acts, He Acts Out!** Imagine the looks on the priest's faces as the water began to slow and then trickle past. God had really done it! God was giving them their own Red Sea moment. God can be a little dramatic at times, not all the time, but sometimes. But here is a little secret: whenever God acts, it is dramatic. When He touches the heart of a child, it is dramatic. When He brings a man to sobriety, it is dramatic. When He heals a marriage, it is dramatic. When He draws a 15-year-old, a 30-year-old, or an 80-year-old to salvation, it is dramatic. And that brings us to the third part of this three-part miracle.

It was a Miracle of Drying. Verse 17 tells us the priests "stood firmly on dry ground" and the people "crossed on dry ground." If a raging, flooding river

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suddenly stopped flowing, the riverbed would be a muddy mess, and it would become even worse as 2-million-plus people walked across it. God not only stopped the water He suddenly and miraculously dried the riverbed. Moreover, He provided a wide enough swath of the dried riverbed so that the people crossed it quickly and with no problem. That is the third great thing we see in the passage: **The Great Culmination**.

Summarize Transition: The entire nation was now, finally, after hundreds of years in the land promised by God. After years of promises and forty years of wandering, they were finally exactly where God wanted them. This group of people chose to follow through on their Great Commitment to follow God. God had responded by doing a Great Act. Now they were experiencing the Great Culmination. We should learn from them to live holy lives of commitment to God's Word, rely on God's timing, and watch for His dramatic work.

But what do we do after God acts? That is what we see in the next passage.

2. LASTING REMINDERS (JOSH. 4:1-7)

Read (or have someone read) Joshua 4:1-7.

Explain: This is the first event recorded among the people after they entered the Promised Land. The activity in the passage is pretty simple: get some guys to move some stone from one place to another. However, there is a lot going on here. These ancient people are building a memorial at Gilgal. Gilgal means "circle of stones." (ETBC, 36) So, the memorial was probably a simple circle of stones. We should not imagine something like Stonehenge because the Bible tells us the man carried the stones on their shoulders.

Nevertheless, it was a simple yet obvious memorial in the midst of the camp. Gilgal became the Israelites' "base of operation" for a time. It was also their first place of worship in the land. Chapter 5 tells us that at Gilgal, the people renewed their commitment to keep God's law and celebrated the Passover. This would mean the people camped there in formation around the Tabernacle. It is most likely that the circle of memorial stone stood in a prominent place among them. So, let's take a moment and discuss the building of this memorial and discover the application for us. We should do so because "Remembering is an essential part of Christian discipleship" (Preaching, 51), and here we learn something about remembering.

A Shared Action (v. 2): God told Joshua and Joshua told the people to select 12 men, "one for each of the Israelite tribes" (v. 5). We see here that this was a shared national act. All of the tribes, even the 2 and a half tribes that remained on the Eastern side of the Jordan, are represented.

- **Application:** When God does something special, all of those involved should make an effort to celebrate. If God does something in your private life, like answering a prayer, you should celebrate it. Likewise, if God does something in your small group or in your church, the whole group should celebrate.

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A Simple Action (v. 3): God did not tell them to build something elaborate as they had with the Tabernacle. He had them build a simple circle of stones.

- **Application:** The celebratory or memorial acts in our lives do not have to be elaborate. They simply need to be meaningful. Consider the two ordinances that Christ gave the church: baptism and communion. They are both simple acts that carry a lot of weight. Our other acts of worship are also simple: singing songs, sitting in meditative silence, and giving an offering. These are all simple acts of worship. Likewise, the ways we choose to memorialize God's work in our lives do not have to be elaborate. It can be a Post-it note on the fridge. It can be a framed picture from a retreat you attended. It can be a saved bulletin from the church service in which God spoke. It can be a postcard from that mission trip where God used you to share the gospel for the first time.

A Symbolic Action (v. 3): God told them to take 12 stones from the middle of the Jordan River where the priests stood. This is important because it is "proof" that God had cut off the water, and these stones came from the bottom of the middle of the river.

- **Application:** When we "establish a memorial" or select something to remind us of God's work, it should be a Memorial that Matters. Consider the stones. When the Israelites gazed at them or even walked by and rubbed them, they would think, "Man, these came from the bottom of the river. God really dried up the river for us." When we look at our memorials, they should be something that elicits an emotion or memory of the Lord's work.

A Steering Actions (vv. 6-7): In verses 6-7, we see that God intended this memorial to mean something not just for the generation that crossed over, but also for future generations as well. It was to be a teaching tool to steer others toward remembrance and worship. Imagine a father and son traveling in this area of Israel, 100 years after the crossing. The son might see this old circle of stones and ask what it means. "How did this get here, Dad?" he might ask." This will give the father the opportunity to tell the story of God's mighty act and steer His child toward faithfulness.

- **Application:** Throughout Scripture, there is a theme of teaching the next generation. Most famously, we find this in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. There, God is telling the people to fill their lives with the Word of God. In verse 7, He tells them to repeat His word to their children. The memorials in our life, whether they be a Post-it note on the fridge, a framed postcard on our desk in the office, or a special pen we wear, can be a tool to teach the next generation. This next generation can be chronologically younger people as well as the next spiritual generation. We can use them as witnessing tools. Your coworker might ask, "What is the framed picture on your desk?" You might answer, "That is a postcard from the Yucatan. That was the first place I led someone to the Lord." You can leave it at that, but they might ask, "What does that mean?" And this gives you an opportunity to share with them.

Summarize and Transition: In this simple passage about a simple circle of stones, we can see that memorials are important. They help us remember what God has done. They give us the opportunity for daily worship. They also steer us and keep us on track. They might give us the opportunity to share with others. We do not

want to litter our lives or our churches with trinkets or memorial plaques. If we did, they would not be special. But when God "acts out" and does something worth remembering, we should find a way to help ourselves remember.

3. LASTING REMINDERS (JOSH. 4:8-9)

Read (or have someone read) Joshua 4:8-9.

Explain: This passage tells us that the people did what God commanded. Verse 9 is a little difficult to translate. It could mean that Joshua set up another circle of stones in the middle of the river that were later covered over by water (That is how the CSB renders it.). It could also simply be a restatement of the events, emphasizing Joshua's leadership. Either way, the point is clear: God told them to establish the memorial, and they did. The most important part of this passage is the last verse. Verse 9 tells us, "The stones are still there today." When the book of Joshua was written, the circle of stones was still in place. It was a lasting memorial.

This can remind us that the mighty works of God produce a lasting effect. Just as the stones remained in place to educate later generations and lead them toward worshipful remembrances, the people of God remained in the land. Even later, when they sinned and faced God's judgment, He brought them back. The "circles of stone" we establish in our lives remind us that God is for us. The works He did in the past are negated by time. Nor are they negated by our sinful actions. The memorials in our lives can also function to draw us back to God and His plans for us.

Maybe the person who went on the mission trip and shared the gospel and memorialized it with a framed postcard drifts from the Lord or ceases to share their faith. The postcard becomes something they look over and fail to notice. But one day it might catch their eye. It can remind them that God can use them to do great things, and it might draw them back to his plan and his purpose.

Summarize and Transition: The people obeyed the Lord and set up the circle of stones. It remained for generations as a testament to the Lord's mighty act. He had given them their Red Sea moment, and the memorial was a testament for the generations. Our lives, whether we have little memorials or not, should be a testament to others. Even our repentance and return to the Lord can be a testament. We should never forget the great things God has done in our lives. He is for us and wants to do great things in and through us.

CONCLUDE

God gave the Israelites a Red Sea moment. He promised it would happen and commanded them to show their trust in Him by stepping out in faith. They experienced the moment because they did what God said. He then instructed them in a memorial building exercise so that they would never forget what He did. God has things He wants to do in your life. We will experience the great acts of God when we follow through and do what He instructs us to do.

Challenge: There are several ways you can apply this passage to your life.

- Ask the Lord to guide you in an act of faith and then follow through on His instructions.
- Step out in faith this week if the Lord has instructed you to do something for Him or His Kingdom.
- Take a moment and consider a great act that God has performed in your life. Spend some time thinking about an appropriate way to memorialize that. We have a tendency to forget, and a memorial will help you remember what He has done.