

Israel Remembers God's Deeds

Devotional Reading: [Luke 8:35–39](#)

Background Scripture: [Exodus 14](#);

[Joshua 3:1–4:24](#)

[Joshua 4:14–24](#)

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.

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.

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.



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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

Generations: From Canaan to
Jerusalem

Unit 1: From Nomadic Tribes to Settled People

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe Joshua's act of remem-

brance at Gilgal.

2. Compare the Israelites' crossing of the Jordan River to their crossing of the Red Sea ([Exodus 14](#)).

3. Make a plan to remember God's acts of faithfulness.

Lesson Outline

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Ink and Stone

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B. Prayer

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How to Say It

Abib A-bib

Asherah Uh-she-ruh

Baal *Bay-ul*
Canaan *Kay-nun*
Canaanite *Kay-nu-nite*
Gilgal *Gil-gal* (*G* as in *get*)
Nisan *Nye-san*
tabernacle **tah**-burr-nah-kul

Introduction

A. Monuments of Memory

Etched into the interior stone walls of the Lincoln Memorial is the following statement, visible to all who visit the ninety-nine-foot-tall structure in Washington, DC: “In this temple, as in the hearts of the people for whom he saved the Union, the memory of Abraham Lincoln is enshrined forever.”

The influence of the sixteenth US president is undeniable. He played a significant role in ending the Civil War, establishing freedom for thousands of enslaved people through the Emancipation Proclamation, and helping to ensure the integrity of the struggling union. Two years after his death, Congress passed the first bills to begin the process of designing a memorial to honor the slain president. Today, this memorial commemorates his service and accomplishments, inviting visitors to reflect on his efforts to create a nation characterized by “liberty and justice for all.”

Memorials and monuments help people remember influential people or significant events. Some memorials serve a distinctly spiritual purpose in reminding people of God’s faithfulness and work. As the ancient Israelites entered the promised land, they commemorated their history and the mighty acts of the Lord for just such a purpose.

B. Lesson Context

Following the death of Moses and his generation, a change in Israelite leadership occurred (see [Numbers 27:12–23](#)). Details of that transition, from Moses to Joshua, are noted in the [Lesson Context](#) of [Lesson 1](#).

Important events take place between the text for last week’s lesson ([Joshua 1:1–11](#)) and the text of this week’s study. Before entering the land of Canaan, Joshua sent spies to explore the land in general and the city of Jericho in particular ([2:1](#)). The lives of these spies were saved by Rahab, a Canaanite woman in Jericho ([2:2–22](#); see [Lesson 4](#)). When the spies returned to Joshua, they reported that Israelite victory in the land was certain ([2:24](#)).

Having received the positive news, Joshua led the people from Shittim to the Jordan River, about five miles west,

where they camped for three days ([Joshua 3:1–2](#)). We might wonder why there is a need to camp for this time after a (perhaps) three-hour walk. One possible answer to that question considers the sheer number of people involved. An earlier census indicates that there were more than 600,000, counting only men aged twenty and older ([Numbers 26:2](#), 51). That number could easily have been tripled or more by adding women and children. Time is required to communicate with and coordinate everything for so many people ([Joshua 3:1–6](#)).

What followed was the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River. Every miracle was intended to highlight the presence of the Lord with Joshua and the Israelites ([Joshua 3:7](#)).

Priests carrying the ark went ahead of the people and entered the river. At that moment, the waters upstream stopped flowing, just as Joshua had promised ([Joshua 3:14–16](#)). As long as the priests and the ark remained in the riverbed, the Israelites could cross over on dry ground. Joshua then selected twelve men, one from each tribe, and instructed them to each choose a stone from the middle of the temporarily dry riverbed ([4:1–3](#)). These stones were arranged in such a way as to serve as a sign or memory device to

following generations regarding the Lord’s deliverance at that very location ([4:6–7](#)).

As today’s lesson begins, almost all the Israelites have crossed the Jordan River on dry ground. Those who hadn’t completed the crossing—namely, the priests with the ark of the covenant—exit last ([Joshua 4:10–13](#)).

I. God’s Proclamation ([Joshua 4:14](#))

A. Joshua’s Reputation (v. [14a](#))

14a. On that day the LORD magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel.

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” (examples: [Genesis 12:2](#); [1 Kings 1:37](#)). 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.

B. People’s Reaction (v. [14b](#))

14b. And they feared him, as they

feared Moses, all the days of his life.

The underlying Hebrew word translated *feared* can mean either feelings of terror (examples: [Joshua 8:1](#); [10:8](#), [25](#)) or reverential respect (example: [Psalm 111:9](#)). Moses had led the Israelites through the Red Sea and into the wilderness, and the people showed him reverential respect ([Exodus 14:31](#)). 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 (see [Lesson Context](#)). But having just experienced a miracle, they obey and respect him as they did Moses (compare [Joshua 1:16–18](#)). Their future as a nation depends on their obedience to Joshua, the Lord’s appointed leader.

Not all leaders of ancient Israel received the same level of respect and support from the people. God chose other leaders, only for those leaders to falter. The examples of Saul, David, and Solomon come to mind ([1 Samuel 15:23–24](#); [2 Samuel 12:7–9](#); [1 Kings 11:9–10](#)). Although Joshua would later act imperfectly ([Joshua 7:2–5](#); [9:14–15](#)), he served God and Moses faithfully throughout his life.

The record of that service describes

him as a “young” assistant to Moses ([Numbers 11:28](#)). Moses had trusted him implicitly with important tasks ([Exodus 17:8–14](#); [24:13](#); [33:11](#); [Numbers 13:16](#)). Moses gently rebuked Joshua on one occasion ([11:28–30](#)), but such is the relationship between mentor and protégé. By the time of the death of Moses, Joshua has had years of experience and servant leadership with the people.

II. God’s Provision

(Joshua 4:15–18)

A. Commanding the Priests (vv. 15–17)

15. And the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying.

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. Command the priests that bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan. Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan.

The *ark* is a rectangular wooden box, overlaid with gold, that contains the stone tablets of the law that were given to

Moses (see [Exodus 25:10–22](#); [37:1–9](#)). It serves as the focal point of tabernacle worship because it is the location for God’s presence and revelation for the Israelites. As they travel through the wilderness toward the promised land, the ark leads them ([Numbers 10:33–36](#); [Joshua 3:3, 6, 15–16](#)). 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 ([Deuteronomy 10:8](#); [31:9](#); [Numbers 3:30–32](#); [Joshua 3:3](#)).

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.

B. Carrying the Ark (v. 18)

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.

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 ([Joshua 3:14, 17](#)). 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 (see next verse). These details and others suggest that the absence of a water obstacle is not simply a natural occurrence such as a drought; God’s power created the pathway.

Several decades earlier, the Lord had made a way for the Hebrews to escape slavery by parting the Red Sea ([Exodus 14:21–22](#)). That miraculous event instilled fear in the inhabitants of Canaan ([Joshua 2:9–10](#)). Now the Lord has miraculously made a way for the people to pass through another body of water unharmed; this results in additional fear on the part of the land’s inhabitants ([5:1](#)).

What Do You Think?

How has God worked miraculously

throughout your life to lead you to the next part of His plan?

Digging Deeper

How do you remain attentive to God's leading, even in situations that seem impossible?

III. God's Promises

(Joshua 4:19–24)

A. Sacred Ground (v. 19)

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.

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 ([Exodus 12:3](#)).

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](#), above), and the fact that this is the time of a harvest ([3:14–15](#)). The name of this month became “Nisan” during the Babylonian

exile centuries later ([Esther 3:7](#)). The month of Abib/Nisan marks the beginning of the “religious year” for the Israelites.

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. The name *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](#)).

B. Significant Stones (vv. 20–23)

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

Joshua had commanded twelve Israelites to collect *twelve stones*, one for each tribe, from the *Jordan* riverbed as they passed through it ([Joshua 4:1–8](#); see [Lesson Context](#)). Previously, Joshua had arranged the stones in the riverbed where the priests were standing ([4:9](#)). 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 pro-

hibits the use of cut stones for constructing altars ([Exodus 20:25](#); compare [Joshua 8:30–31](#)). 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 (next verse).

21–22. 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? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land.

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.

What Do You Think?

How do you intentionally share with younger generations about your faith in

God and His transforming mercy?

Digging Deeper

What is one action you can take in the upcoming week to build a spiritual legacy within your family?

Ink and Stone

Early in our marriage, my husband noticed several stacks of loose letters, cards, and drawings scattered around my office. He asked, “Why are you keeping all this stuff? If it really means something to you, we can just scan them and throw the originals away.” He sees pieces of paper as a bother, and he’ll always prefer digital versions to physical copies.

I, on the other hand, love physical paper copies. I love seeing the ink blotches on a handwritten letter. I cherish seeing and touching notes, photos, and gifts from the past. Holding a handwritten note from a dear friend, written twenty years ago, helps me remember the feel of her hug, hear her laughter, and delight in the blessing of her presence. Physical items have the power to evoke significant memories.

The stone monument on the banks of the Jordan River was one such physical reminder for the Israelites. The people could see the stones and be reminded of God’s faithfulness, guidance, and direction.



Visual for [Lesson 2](#). Display this visual as you ask participants to share with a partner a story of how they have experienced God's faithfulness.

Ink and stone—both serve as physical reminders of the past. What is a physical reminder of God's past faithfulness and blessing toward you?

—KS

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.

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 (example: [1 Kings 18:16–38](#)). During the creation of the world, God separated the waters from dry land ([Genesis 1:9](#)). He has total control over the waters, the winds, and all parts of creation (compare [Matthew 8:23–27](#)). 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” ([Exodus 3:8, 17](#); [13:5](#); [33:3](#)).

What Do You Think?

What are the points of similarity and dissimilarity between the Israelites’ crossing of the Jordan River and their crossing of the Red Sea?

Digging Deeper

What do these events teach us about God and His relationship with His people?

Fifty Years of Faithfulness

My dad has faithfully served as a minister of God's Word for over fifty years. Throughout his lengthy ministry, he has witnessed numerous examples of God's faithfulness. For instance, there was a time when our family needed a second vehicle, but we did not have the money to buy one. God, in His faithfulness, moved the heart of another believer to donate a car. While the vehicle was far from luxurious—it was at least twenty years old and barely running—it served as a tangible example of God's provision. It met our needs and allowed us to help others. My dad can still recall multiple examples like this one when the Lord's faithfulness was evident.

How often do you take time to reflect on God's faithfulness? To fail to do so is to face the consequences of forgetting God (see [Psalm 78](#)). As the Israelites entered the promised land, they remembered God's faithfulness to them—from the deliverance out of Egyptian bondage, to the crossing of the Red Sea, to their passage through the Jordan River.

What needs to happen for you to shift your focus from the troubles of the moment to the power and faithfulness of

C. Sovereign Strength (v. 24)

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.

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 ([Exodus 13:3, 9, 14](#); [Deuteronomy 6:21; 7:8; 9:26](#); see [Jeremiah 32:21](#)).

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](#); [Judges 2:11](#); [Psalm 18:15](#); [Isaiah 53:1](#)). These are to be taken figuratively since God does not have a physical body ([John 4:24](#)).

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 ([Proverbs 1:7; 9:10](#)). On the other hand, to have no fear of God is to invite dire consequences ([Psalms 36:1–4; 55:19](#)).

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.

What Do You Think?

What steps can you take to cultivate greater reverence or "fear" of the Lord?

Digging Deeper

How is fear of the Lord related to obedience to the Lord?

Conclusion

A. Memory by Monuments

We create monuments of various sorts to commemorate significant leaders, historical events, and consequential actions. But how often do we build memorials to celebrate God's work?

Scripture provides several examples of God's people constructing memorials to remember and celebrate God's work.

These memorials come in different forms, including physical structures (example: [Genesis 28:18–22](#)), sacred ceremonies (example: [Exodus 12:14](#)), and specific days of observance (example: [20:8–11](#)). Despite such differences, these memorials serve a common purpose: to remember and celebrate God's faithfulness.

One of Joshua's first actions as leader was to institute the memorial at Gilgal. Before the people went further into the land, they collectively paused to ensure remembrance of the Lord's providing a way to cross the Jordan River.

Think about that sequence: (1) God provides, then (2) the people ensure remembrance, then (3) the people move on. Do we follow that same pattern, or do we skip step 2?

If we pay attention to God's work, we will find moments where He has provided for us. When we notice God's work, we can build our own memorials to God's work. Although we may not construct a stone monument, other ways exist to remember and celebrate God's work and faithfulness.

What Do You Think?

What memorial can you create to remember and celebrate God's work?

Digging Deeper

In what ways do the practice of baptism and the observance of the Lord's Supper serve as such memorials?

B. Prayer

Lord God, You have done mighty works for Your people, culminating in Your saving acts through Jesus Christ. Strengthen our resolve to remember these acts so that we can fully understand and celebrate Your steadfast faithfulness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Create reminders of God's steadfast
faithfulness!