

Twelve Memorial Stones

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Israel crosses the Jordan river and establishes a memorial to God’s power
2. aim – to cause us to remember, through all the means given to us, Christ’s power in delivering us
3. passage – Joshua 4:1-24

b. outline

1. The Crossing Completed (Joshua 4:10b-11; 15-19)
2. The Men at the Front of the Crossing (Joshua 4:12-14)
3. The Twelve Memorial Stones (Joshua 4:1-10a; 20-24)

c. opening

1. the *reality* of this pericope
 - a. **chap. 4** completes the crossing narrative of **chap. 3** by providing *additional* details
 - b. **chap. 4** is *disjointed* – it “jumps around” between the explanation of **3:12** and the completion of the river crossing of **3:17**, including other details in the story that are significant *in themselves*
 1. *i.e.* we cannot look at the narrative *straight through*, but will need to address it *topically*

I. The Crossing Completed (Joshua 4:10b-11; 15-19)

Content

a. an overview of the river crossing

1. the river crossing is *begun* in **3:14** – at the *end* of the chapter, we are left with the people “*passing over*” – *i.e.* **chap. 3 ends in the middle of the event**; now we see the *end* of the story
 - a. the end of the crossing is described in **vv. 10b-11** (with a parenthesis added in **vv. 12-14**) and completes in **vv. 15-19** (with the rest of the chapter being its *primary point*)
 - b. **vv. 10b-11**: the people pass over “*in haste*” – the *natural* response of a people passing through a flood plain – and *then*, the priests and the ark pass over “*before*” the people (**see below**)
 - c. **vv. 15-19**: once the people have all safely passed over, Joshua commands the priests and the ark to come up out of the (now dry) Jordan – and *then*, the water returns from the N (**see below**)
 1. in **v. 19**, Joshua records the date (the 10th day of the first month) and their location (Gilgal)
2. gleaning the details from **chaps. 3-4**, the river crossing can be described with the following details:
 - a. Joshua commands the Levitical priests to carry the ark down to the water’s edge (**3:11, 13**)
 1. Levitical priests = the descendants/family of Aaron (not the Levites *as a whole*) – two generations (or more) past Aaron (who is now dead; **Num. 20:24ff**)
 2. they step into the flood water with the ark – God *miraculously* a) stops the water to the N (at Adam) and (**logically**) b) causes the water in the flood plain to drain away quickly
 - a. **note**: it *typically* takes days or weeks for a flood plain to recede
 3. the priests then continue forward to the middle (“*midst*”; **3:17**) of the river basin *and stop there*
 - b. Joshua leads the people into the river (**note**: this only a *logical* guess, based on **4:14**)
 1. the fighting men of Reuben and Gad (and ½ Manasseh) follow Joshua before the rest of the people (**4:12**; “*before the people*”; **see below**) – *then*, the 9½ tribes cross the river one-by-one
 - c. the designated men from each tribe collect a stone from the *center* of the river-bed, either:
 1. by going *back into the river as a group from the other side* – this would be the most *literal* reading of **4:1** – that when *everyone has crossed*, then God commands Joshua to set aside a man from each tribe, and they *then* go back to collect a stone
 2. or (**more logically**), *that each tribe is led by this designated man* (already set aside *before* the people begin to cross; **3:12**), collecting a stone to bring over “*with you*” (**4:3**)
 - a. **IOW: 4:1** can be read as the *completion* of what God had already commanded: take the stones that *have already been collected* and build them into a memorial (**see below**)
 - d. Joshua commands the Levitical priests to bring the ark up out of the Jordan (**4:16-18**)
 1. the priests step *out* of where the water had originally been – God *miraculously* a) allows the water to the N (at Adam) to flow again, and (**logically**) b) fills the flood plain quickly
3. thus, the crossing of the Jordan is likened to the crossing of the Red Sea (**see below**)
 - a. God parts the water, the people pass through, and God restores the water to its place

II. The Men at the Front of the Crossing (Joshua 4:12-14)

Content

a. the armed men of Reuben and Gad (vv. 12-13)

- note:** this is the fulfillment of the *command* given to these men in **1:12-18**
 - reminder:** when the Israelites arrived in Gilead (to the E of the Jordan, just before this time), the tribes of **Reuben and Gad** choose to settle in that place instead of taking land to the W (**Num. 32**)
 - the leaders of these two tribes promise that they will send their fighting men with the rest of Israel across the Jordan until the W tribes are settled; they will leave their families in fortified cities in the Transjordan, and cross the river with the rest of the tribes to fight before them
 - and, Moses accepts their request, but *solemnly warns them* that failure to take up arms and cross with the rest of Israel would mean their destruction – the leaders agree to these terms
 - so, in these verses the *completion of that promise* is detailed – about 40,000 armed men “pass over” with the rest of Israel
- it is *likely* that these 40,000 follow Joshua as the first *men across the river*, because:
 - the words “*before the people*” (**v. 12**) seems to indicate such
 - Reuben is the *first-born* of Israel, and it seems *possible* that representatives of his tribe are first
 - it is *unknown* what the Israelites may encounter (by way of hostility) on the other side of the Jordan
 - so, Joshua would *most likely* want a *fighting force* to go first to act as a protection of the rest
- remember:** *after* the remaining 9½ tribes cross, there would still be a large contingent of Israelites *remaining on the other side* (*i.e.* the women, children, older men of Reuben, Gad, ½ Manasseh)
 - so ... another reason for Moses insisting (and Joshua commanding) the fighting men of these tribes to cross with the rest is *symbolic*: be *truthfully* said that “all” Israel passed over the Jordan
 - i.e.* every tribe is *represented* in the river crossing, even though not all actually go across
 - e.g.* there are *twelve* stones in the memorial (**see below**)

b. the exaltation of Joshua (v. 14)

- note:** this is the fulfillment of the *commissioning* given to Joshua in **1:5-9**
 - “*on that day the Lord exalted Joshua*” = the people “*stand in awe*” of Joshua, just like Moses
 - i.e.* the crossing of the Jordan stands before the people as a miraculous event *at the hand of Joshua* – although he does not *cause it*, the people see *in it* the power of God *through Joshua*
 - i.e.* Joshua has already been actively leading and commanding the people (like Moses in Egypt)
 - but, once across the river (or the Red Sea) *into uncharted territory*, the people now turn to him
- LOW:** although God is the sovereign One who ordains all things to be accomplished according to his will, he (most) often uses *secondary means* (*i.e.* people) to accomplish those purposes
 - e.g.* God *could* supernaturally convert *anyone* to Christ, but he chooses *preaching* as the means
 - i.e.* God parted the river, but Joshua led the people across – he is the *means* of the future

III. The Twelve Memorial Stones (Joshua 4:1-10a; 20-24)

Content

a. the nature of the twelve stones

- note:** 14½ verses of the chapter are dedicated to the twelve memorial stones, and Joshua repeats several parts of the story (**see below**) *to make his point stick*
 - so ... I will not read all of the verses ... but will summarize ...
 - i.e.* this is a “memorial” chapter of a memorial device designed to memorialize something ...
- one stone per tribe is included in the memorial (**vv. 3, 5, 8, 20**)
 - note:** this *would* include the tribes of **Reuben and Gad** – one of the fighting men from each of these tribes also would be designated to select and carry a stone from the river
 - i.e.* to show future generations that *all of Israel* was “represented” in this river crossing
- each stone is heavy, so that the memorial will stand permanently (**v. 5**)
 - each man taking up a stone “*upon his shoulder*” is an indication of *weight* (*e.g.* slinging something heavy upon your shoulder makes it much easier to carry than just in your arms; **shingles**)
 - i.e.* the stones are probably *boulder* sized (**officially:** greater than 10.1 inches in diameter) – designed to be *unmovable* once arranged into a memorial
- the stones are taken from the center of the river, to show that the people had crossed it (**vv. 8, 20**)
 - i.e.* the stones are taken from the *center* of where the river would normally flow – to show that the people selected stones *normally underwater* because the ground there was “*dry*”
- Joshua arranges the stones as a memorial at the river’s edge (**vv. 9, 20**)

- a. how he arranges them is unknown (e.g. a simply pyramid of 5-4-3?), but the arrangement is designed to last to future generations
- b. **note:** the term “*midst*” of the waters in v. 9 seems to imply that he set up the stones *in the river*
 1. i.e. that is where the “*feet of the priests*” were, in the *center* of the river
 2. but ... that would defeat the purpose of the memorial (i.e. if it went back underwater)
 3. so, the *more likely* explanation is either, he set up the memorial:
 - a. at the *edge* of the flood plain on dry ground (i.e. where the priests *came ashore*)
 - b. or, *in* the flooded area at the edge of the river (i.e. in the flood waters, so that it would be positioned next to the river most of the time)

b. the intention of the twelve stones

1. the memorial is designed to be a marker *for future generations* of what happened in this place
 - a. the Israelites were tell their children (vv. 6, 21f) that the Lord had “*dried up the waters*” of the river *in much the same way he had parted the Red Sea* (read vv. 23-24)
 - b. i.e. in the future, *when the memory of the event naturally fades*, the memorial built by Joshua would be a perpetual reminder to them of the *miraculous* work of God to bring them to this place
 - c. **note:** Joshua equates this event to crossing of the Red Sea (v. 23) – a *clear indication* of the power of Yahweh to establish them in this land – ***his hand leading them to what he promised***
 1. (as before) the crossing of each body of water represents the beginning of a *new phase*
 2. the former generation saw the power of God, and *rejected it* – this generation sees God act *again* in a miraculous way in order to *know* his power, and to trust that power going forward ...

c. the value of the twelve stones

1. **question:** is there any event in the life of a follower of Christ in which he takes something from the earth and uses it as a *reminder* of the work of God (IOW: is there any event in the life of God’s people where they *memorialize* something God has done *on their behalf* through *tangible elements*)?
2. **answer:** it is through ***the Lord’s Supper***, solemnly eating the ***fruit of the field*** and the ***fruit of the vine***, in which the Christian *memorializes* the work of Christ through the elements of the earth
 - a. **note (again):** we do not draw our view of the Lord’s Table from this narrative
 - b. i.e. like the people taking stones from the river to stack as a reminder of what God has done for them, so the Christian takes bread and wine as a reminder of the finished work of Christ
 1. **note:** the ***fruit of the field*** (made into bread) and the ***fruit of the vine*** (made into wine) are two (2) of the most significant food sources for ancient Israel (with the ***fruit of the tree***)
 2. the bread reminds us of Jesus’ broken body, the wine his spilt blood (or, Jesus’ perfect righteousness imputed *to us*, and his propitiation of God’s wrath *from us*)
 - b. i.e. and, like Israel *first* passing through the water before setting up the memorial, so believers must *first* pass through baptism before they can *then* memorialize their faith at the table
 1. another reason why the ***Baptist*** view of the Table is only for those baptized first
 - c. ***the days of slavery (to sin) and wandering (in darkness) are past, and now comes a time of Conquest – our conquest of the remaining enemies in the flesh in our sanctification***
 - d. i.e. the Table is a ***perpetual reminder*** to us that God has *indeed* killed us *in Christ*, raised us *in Christ*, and is now *by the power of his Spirit* mortifying the remaining effects of sin in us