

In the previous chapter the Lord had told the people that when they saw God dry up the Jordan River, they would know that God would defeat the nations on the other side of the Jordan. It was a sign to give them confidence in the Lord's power and in Joshua as their leader. It was proof that Joshua was hearing from the Lord.

¹ When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, ² "Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, ³ and command them, saying, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight.'" ⁴ Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. ⁵ And Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, Joshua 4:1-5 The nation had passed over with their families and herds and the tabernacle of God. What do you think the people of Jericho thought when they saw this took place? If Tel Jericho is the ancient site of Jericho, the people of Jericho could have watched that event. Spies surely witnessed it. What chance do you have against an army whose God stops a river for them? The smart move would have been to wave the white flag and say, "Here is our city, we give it to you, just tell us about your God so we can worship Him." The fact that they did not do so is evidence of the hardness of their hearts.

In chapter 3 the LORD commanded Joshua to pick a man from each tribe. It does not tell us the purpose until we get to these verses. They were to go into the dry riverbed and pick out twelve stones from where the priests were standing and bring them into the camp. They could not have been very large stones, as each man carried the stone on his shoulder. They were to bring them to the place they would camp, Gilgal.

⁶ that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' ⁷ then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever." Joshua 4:6,7 In those days people would stand large stones to mark important events and remind future generations of what had taken place (1 Samuel 7:12ⁱ). Sometimes the stones would bear inscriptions explaining the event or treaty. This pile of twelve stones was to remind the future Israelites of the miracle that God did in opening the way into the land He had promised to Abraham's descendants (Genesis 17:8ⁱⁱ). God had shown His amazing power in parting the Red Sea to deliver them from the Egyptians (Exodus 14:21ⁱⁱⁱ), and now in a similar way He parted the Jordan and dried up the passageway so the Israelites could enter the Promised Land. Both ends of the wilderness journey were marked by a parting of the waters.

The Bible begins with a parting of the waters. Genesis 1:6^{iv} tells us God separated the waters from the waters. In Revelation 17:15^v we are told that waters are representative of people. Could it be that God was emphasizing the fact that He was separating them to be a people for Himself both in coming out of Egypt and in entering the Promised Land to conquer the nations? Listen to the instruction of 2 Corinthians 6:17,18. *¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, ¹⁸ and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."* God has always been

seeking a people to call His sons and daughters (Isaiah 43:6^{vi}). He calls us out of the world's nations and makes us a nation of kings and priests (Exodus 19:6^{vii}).

We don't know where that pile of stones is today, but stones don't just vanish. They are probably still in the area, buried with the sands of time. The historical fact that the entire nation crossed over when the Jordan was overflowing its banks stands as a testimony to the faithfulness of God to keep His promises. What has remained for all to read is the account we are reading, preserved by God despite all the attempts throughout history to destroy it. It is a miracle that these Scriptures survived. In that sense our Bibles are the standing stones that remain.

It is also a miracle that there is still a nation of Israel to be reminded of God's faithfulness. Nations don't disappear for 2000 years and suddenly reemerge without God intervening. Both the Scriptures and the existence of the nation of Israel remind us of the faithfulness of our God (Deuteronomy 7:9^{viii})!

There is a stone that we look to today. **Jesus went through the great flood of the wrath of God, and God carried Him out and established the memorials of communion and baptism. Those memorials remind us of His great acts of death for our sins, burial, and resurrection.** Our Cornerstone is also the capstone (Isaiah 28:16^{ix}), the beginning and the end (Revelation 21:6^x). We are to be reminded regularly and to tell our children that God made a way for us (Deuteronomy 6:7^{xi}). Just as the ark of the covenant representing the presence of God stopped the flood waters, so our Savior stood in the way of the wrath of God, and in doing so He made a way for us to pass over from death to life.

⁸ And the people of Israel did just as Joshua commanded and took up twelve stones out of the midst of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, just as the LORD told Joshua. And they carried them over with them to the place where they lodged and laid them down there. ⁹ And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day. Joshua 4:8,9 There is an expression repeated ten times in Joshua, "just as the LORD (or Moses or Joshua) commanded." This is emphasizing the faithfulness of Joshua and the people of Israel during this time in their history. While the people will have short periods of history where they turn to the LORD, they are soon followed by a period of unfaithfulness. The repetition of the expression is emphasizing Joshua's faithfulness as a leader. In that sense he foreshadows our leader, Yeshua/Jesus, the ultimate leader who gives us the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to faithfully follow (Acts 1:8^{xii}).

Verse eight describes the twelve men carrying out Joshua's command to set up the stones at their camp. There is a difference of opinion about the original language of verse nine. It is either describing Joshua setting up the stones the men took from the Jordan, or describing Joshua erecting twelve stones in the Jordan riverbed. The Israelites had experience moving large stones from their time in Egypt. They may have set up such large stones in the riverbed that flood waters did not move them.

¹⁰ For the priests bearing the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua. The people passed over in haste. ¹¹ And when all the people had finished passing over, the ark of the LORD and the priests passed over before the people. ¹² The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh passed over armed before the people of Israel, as Moses had told them. ¹³ About 40,000

ready for war passed over before the LORD for battle, to the plains of Jericho. ¹⁴ On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they stood in awe of him just as they had stood in awe of Moses, all the days of his life. Joshua 4:10-14

While the presence of God represented by the ark of the Lord was in the riverbed, the priests knew they were safe. The people went over in haste as it would take all day even if they were 100 abreast. The men whose families remained on the other side came just as they had promised Moses. We are given the number of men age twenty probably to fifty years of age (Numbers 4:3^{xiii}) from two and a half tribes, 40,000. That is about 16,000 per tribe, which times twelve would be an army of about 192,000 soldiers.

One purpose of God in this event was to have the people be in awe of Joshua like they had been in awe of Moses. Joshua was the appointed leader of the theocracy, and in unity with the high priest, Eleazar, they heard from God and faithfully relayed His instructions to the people. Remember it was Joshua who often remained at the tent of meeting even after Moses finished speaking with the LORD (Exodus 33:11^{xiv}).

As I have pointed out earlier, we now have the Word of God in written form, the full revelation of God. We have the record of the life of Jesus who revealed God to us (Hebrews 1:1-3^{xv}). Believers have the Holy Spirit residing in them (Ephesians 2:22^{xvi}). The church is not a theocratic nation, but rather Spirit led individuals in groups led by the Word and equal and accountable elders (Hebrews 13:17^{xvii}). And yet, together with those who have gone before, we make up the body of Christ, the kingdom of God.

I can say that I have been in awe of a few men of God who demonstrated the fruits of the Spirit and lived lives of total dedication. Not one of them ever tried to tell me what God's will was for me. In fact, the people who did try I generally saw as misguided. We have too many church leaders who would like to hold this kind of Old Testament authority. They say, "Thus saith the Lord!" But when it doesn't come to pass, people still continue to follow them. Church, use discernment. Learn to sense that check in your heart from the Spirit (Isaiah 30:21^{xviii}). If you walk with the Lord each day and get to know God's Word, you won't be intimidated or misled by these charlatans who claim to speak for God. You will instead quote to them the Scriptures which contradict their babble.

There is an exception to this. Sometimes a brother or sister will share a verse with you out of a humble heart and that verse convicts you. You know in your spirit that it was from God. They don't have to say, "God told me to tell you..." You will know. It will come in the spirit of love (1 Corinthians 14:3^{xix}). That is a blessing (Proverbs 27:6^{xx})!

¹⁵ And the LORD said to Joshua, ¹⁶ "Command the priests bearing the ark of the testimony to come up out of the Jordan." ¹⁷ So Joshua commanded the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan." ¹⁸ And when the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD came up from the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up on dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks, as before. Joshua 4:15-18 I would have expected a huge wall of water to have come roaring down the riverbed once the water was released, but it appears God let it out slowly so it simply returned to the normal flood level. Remember the people of Jericho could see all this from the top of their walls.

¹⁹ The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. ²⁰ And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. ²¹ And he said to the people of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?'

22 then you shall let your children know, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground. 23 For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, Joshua 4:19-23 The tenth of Nisan was the day in which Israelites were to select their lamb for the Passover on the 14th. Then they left Egypt to follow the cloud to the Promised Land (Exodus 12:3^{xxi},6^{xxii}). Their entry into the Promised Land of milk and honey was a new beginning also. But there was another event that happened centuries later on the tenth of Nisan, the Triumphal Entry (Matthew 21:6-9^{xxiii}), when Jesus presented Himself to be the sacrificial Lamb of God (John 1:29^{xxiv}). **The fact that God had Jesus enter Jerusalem on that date is to show that the event pictured new beginnings, liberation, and inheritance.** Jesus' sacrifice of Himself brings us out of bondage (John 8:34^{xxv}) and wilderness wandering and into the promised land of eternal life filled with the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23^{xxvi}).

Gilgal, we find in the next chapter, means rolled away. The reproach of the people was rolled away. We will talk about that important point in the next chapter. It was there that Joshua set up the twelve stones taken out of the Jordan. We have quite a bit of repetition in this chapter. That is for emphasis. It is important for us to tell our children and grandchildren the things God has done for us, the miracles He has done in our lives. If you are born-again, they need to know about that miracle.

We have seen miracles here at Wayside. We see God provide financially to give such a large portion of our income to missions each year and still have a fairly-compensated staff. Many churches our size struggle with that but we never have. We have seen the conversion of New Age leaders and drug addicts. We have seen people commit their lives to a mission and give up everything to do so. We saw God challenge us to give \$100,000 to missions and then replace it even before we gave it out. We have seen many lives that were lukewarm become dedicated to Jesus. We have seen thousands subscribe to the sermons from this little church and disciples made in foreign nations. Have you told your children and grandchildren? We certainly should.

One modern way of setting up standing stones is to have a diary of how God has worked in our lives. Leave it behind for posterity. And **why do we do this? So that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, and that you may fear/reverence the LORD your God forever!**

24 so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever." Joshua 4:24 Here are the two reasons God did this amazing miracle. The first is that the world might know that God is mighty. Israel was chosen by God to be a testimony to the world that our Creator is great, to be held in awe, and is reaching out to us (John 3:17^{xxvii}). Israel was to be an evangelistic message to the world of the goodness and grace of God. But, like much of the church today, they began to see themselves as the chosen frozen and despise those who were not Jews. Their outreach was mostly for the reason of boasting and conforming others to their many rules. The same thing happens today with all faiths. Rules end up substituting for a genuine relationship that God desires.

Secondly, it was to cause the Jews to be in awe of God forever, to reverence His holiness and fear His judgments. Four times in this passage Joshua told them God is the LORD *your* God. He is a personal God who has claimed us as His own. We need to remember He is *our* Almighty God (Matthew 19:26^{xxviii}).

Remembering is an important task of the followers of Jesus. We celebrate communion so that we might remember (Luke 22:19^{xxxix}). In a world where we are constantly seeking new experiences, new information, and new technology, we can forget the greatness of God as recorded in His Word and even as experienced in our own lives. That is why remembering is important. Write down those amazing encounters with God, the coincidences that are just too strange to be an accident, where you saw God at work in your life. Remembering is why reading through the Bible is a necessity that should be a lifelong habit (Psalm 103:2^{xxx}).

More than the miracle, the emphasis is on the greatness of God. It was to encourage the people's faith in God. It also put the fear of God in the enemies and warning them that they were serving false gods. *¹ As soon as all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their hearts melted and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel.* Joshua 5:1

This is the conclusion of the previous chapter. The Canaanites must have wondered what kind of people serve a God who would stop a raging river for them. They had already heard of their crossing of the Red Sea and the victories over the nations on the other side of the Jordan. Who could stand against a people with a God like that? Surely, as Rahab declared, *"He is God in heaven above and the earth beneath"* (Joshua 2:11^{xxxi}). He is the same God today! He is still doing wonders, and we need to hear and share those testimonies especially with our children and those with whom God put us together.

The fact that God did this in the sight of the people of Jericho also shows His gracious warnings to repent or perish (Luke 13:3^{xxxii}). He had given that people group 400 years to repent and change their ways (Genesis 15:16^{xxxiii}), yet He still gave them one last visible warning. He does not desire the death of the wicked but invites the world to Himself in love while also warning of His justice (1 John 4:9,10^{xxxiv}).

The nation of Israel could rest without fear of attack that night for the God who does wonders had shown His power again. **God's love expressed on the cross and His power in the resurrection is why we can rest secure in this life. We serve an all-powerful, holy, God.**

Communion is our standing stone, our memorial marker, the place we go to remember the mighty acts of God. That is where we find our rest. It is a visible reminder so much greater than the twelve stones, for it points to the Cornerstone who is also the Capstone, and the Rock of offense (Isaiah 8:14^{xxxv}). It tells us of how great God's love is for us (John 15:13^{xxxvi}). It reminds us of the great cost paid in love so that we, the children of God, could enter our promised land. The Son of God loved you and me and gave His life for us (Galatians 2:20^{xxxvii}). Have you entered His rest and ceased from your own labors (Hebrews 4:10^{xxxviii})? Are you standing on that unshakable Rock of faith in Christ Jesus? Jesus taught that if we build our house on a rock it will stand the storms of life (Matthew 7:24,25^{xxxix}). The only standing stone to build our life around is the rock of Christ Jesus, remembering all He accomplished for us.

Questions:

1 Why and how did God warn Jericho?

- 2 Why did they set up twelve stones?
- 3 What stone reminds us of God's great acts?
- 4 What is the difference between the church and Israel?
- 5 What events happened on the 10th of Nisan? Connection?
- 6 Why did God stop the Jordan River?
- 7 What is our act of remembrance?
- 8 Why was this the time to enter?
- 9 Why could they rest while in the sight of their enemy?
- 10 Why can we rest when Satan is a roaring lion?

ⁱ **1Samuel 7:12** Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, "Till now the Lord has helped us." ⁱ

ⁱⁱ **Genesis 17:8 (ESV)**

⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

ⁱⁱⁱ **Exodus 14:21 (ESV)**

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

^{iv} **Genesis 1:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters."

^v **Revelation 17:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ And the angel said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.

^{vi} **Isaiah 43:6 (ESV)**

⁶ I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth,

^{vii} **Exodus 19:6 (ESV)**

⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

^{viii} **Deuteronomy 7:9 (ESV)**

⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,

^{ix} **Isaiah 28:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be in haste.'

^x **Revelation 21:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.

^{xi} **Deuteronomy 6:7 (ESV)**

⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

^{xii} **Acts 1:8 (ESV)**

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

^{xiii} **Numbers 4:3 (ESV)**

³ from thirty years old up to fifty years old, all who can come on duty, to do the work in the tent of meeting.

^{xiv} **Exodus 33:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

^{xv} **Hebrews 1:1-3 (ESV)**

¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

^{xvi} **Ephesians 2:22 (ESV)**

²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

^{xvii} **Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

^{xviii} **Isaiah 30:21 (ESV)**

²¹ And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

^{xix} **1 Corinthians 14:3 (ESV)**

³ On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and.

^{xx} **Proverbs 27:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

^{xxi} **Exodus 12:3 (ESV)**

³ Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household.

^{xxii} **Exodus 12:6 (ESV)**

⁶ and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

^{xxiii} **Matthew 21:6-9 (ESV)**

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ⁸ Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

^{xxiv} **John 1:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

^{xxv} **John 8:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

^{xxvi} **Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

^{xxvii} **John 3:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

^{xxviii} **Matthew 19:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

^{xxix} **Luke 22:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

^{xxx} **Psalms 103:2 (ESV)**

² Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,

^{xxxi} **Joshua 2:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

^{xxxii} **Luke 13:3 (ESV)**

³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

^{xxxiii} **Genesis 15:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

^{xxxiv} **1 John 4:9-10 (ESV)**

⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

^{xxxv} **Isaiah 8:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

^{xxxvi} **John 15:13 (ESV)**

¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

^{xxxvii} **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

^{xxxviii} **Hebrews 4:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

^{xxxix} **Matthew 7:24,25 (ESV)**

²⁴ "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.