

Joshua 4

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[0 : 00] Take your Bibles going to the book of Joshua, Joshua chapter 4. Joshua chapter 4. We were together on Wednesday night. We were looking at Joshua chapter 3, and I told you when we were looking at Joshua chapter 3, and reality is you need to see Joshua chapter 3 and 4 together.

It is a text that should really be read together in personal reading, but when it comes time to preaching and really expounding upon it, we take our time and we digest it in smaller chunks. It speaks to us of one great account. It tells us of the crossing of the Jordan River going into the Promised Land. There seems to be some repetition in the two chapters, and that was intentionally slow.

Some have described it much like you would in watching a movie, how you see the same scene being repeated at different angles or in different genres and in different lights. This is the same event that we see.

Some historically have seen these chapters as being contradictory of one another. Hopefully by the time we're through with it, we will see that those contradictions are very easily resolved in the reality of what is going on because this is a very instrumental portion of the nation of Israel in really in the character of God.

[1 : 06] Not so much the miraculous event that he dried up the Jordan River because we've seen in Joshua chapter 3 that the Jordan River was dried up. All the water stood up in the heap in Adam, some 19 to 20 miles away, and he stopped the flow of water, and they crossed on dry land.

And that's really all we're told about it. He did it, and the land dried up, and they walked across. I love the simplicity. I know we need to get into the text and pray. I love the simplicity in Scripture when it says that he parted the Red Sea and they crossed on dry land.

That's all we need to know, right? That he stopped the flow of the Jordan River and they crossed on dry land. That's all we need to know. So it's just really matter-of-fact stated, and it's very in simplicity.

We say, well, how did he do it? We'd like to see the miraculous, and we want him to explain the supernatural to us, and maybe he used natural means to do it. The reality is that he did it.

It's not so much important as how he did it. It's in fact, and we'll see it this evening, that he did it because this is the fulfillment of the purpose. He brought them out to bring them in.

[2 : 12] He brings them in. He brought them out to bring them in. He didn't just set to free the nation of Israel from Egyptian slavery, as we say, to wander around the wilderness.

His purpose and plan for bringing them out of Egypt was to bring them into the Promised Land. God keeps his word. He keeps his word. On this side of the cross, on this side of the fullness of the revelation of God recorded in Scripture, we call that the security of the saints.

We know he's bringing us in because he keeps his word. He keeps his word. If he has to part the Jordan River to do it, he'll part it, and we'll walk across, and it'll be very simple. It'll happen just like that.

He keeps his word. Let's pray, and then we'll get right to the text. Lord, thank you so much just for allowing us to gather together. Thank you for the benefit of fellowship. Thank you for the blessing of Bible study, and Lord, the opportunity that we have to learn and to grow and to dive deeper into your word, and we pray that your word would resonate within our hearts and minds, that we would come to a greater understanding of it, and Lord, through that understanding, that our lives would be molded and shaped by it.

Lord, we ask that you would be glorified through our study of the Scripture, that you would be exalted in our presence, and Lord, we just want to give you all the praise in advance for it, and we ask it in Christ's name.

[3 : 35] Amen. If you remember Joshua chapter 3, there is the crossing, and the Ark of the Covenant was to go before them. The priests of the Levites were to carry the Ark of the Covenant,

and they were to stand up and go, and when the nation saw the Ark of the Covenant going, they were to move.

So as it moved, they moved. They were to stay about a half a mile's distance, some 2,000 cubits away from it, so that they could see it, because they're going into a new land. And the beauty of it is, is when those Levites who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant stepped into the Jordan River, the moment their feet got wet in faith, the water dried up.

They stood in the midst of the Jordan, and everyone crossed by. They passed through that land. We'll see that here in just a moment. We're told that it happens that they finished crossing in chapter 3, and then we're retold in a different light in chapter 4 how this event takes place.

If you remember, God is leading them into this land. They are now going to inhabit this place that they are supposed to be. This is a very, really important time with the nation.

This is an important time historically. This is an important time theologically. This matters. And it says here in Joshua chapter 4, So Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the sons of Israel, one man from each tribe, and Joshua said to them, Cross again to the Ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel.

[5 : 13] Let this be a sign among you, so that when your children ask later, saying, What do these stones mean to you? Then you shall say to them, Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off, so these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever.

Thus the sons of Israel did as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, just as the Lord spoke to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel. And they carried them over with them to the lodging place, and put them down there.

Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan, at the place where the feet of the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant were standing, and they are there to this day. For the priests who carried the Ark were standing in the middle of the Jordan, until everything was completed, that the Lord had commanded Joshua to speak to the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua.

And the people hurried and crossed. And when all the people had finished crossing, the Ark of the Lord and the priests crossed before the people. The sons of Reuben, and the sons of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, crossed over in battle arrayed before the sons of Israel, just as Moses had spoken to them.

About forty thousand equipped for war, crossed for battle before the Lord to the desert plains of Jericho. On that day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, so that they revered him, just as they had revered Moses all the days of his life.

[6 : 30] Now the Lord said to Joshua, Command the priests who carried the Ark of the Testament, that they come up from the Jordan. So Joshua commanded the priests, saying, Come up from the Jordan. It came about when the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord had come up from the middle of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up to the dry ground, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place, and they went over all its banks as before.

Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth of the first month and camped at Gilgal on the eastern edge of Jericho. Those twelve stones which they had taken from the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal.

He said to the sons of Israel, When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What are these stones? Then you shall inform your children, saying, Israel, cross this Jordan on dry ground. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the Lord your God had done to the Red Sea, which he dried up before us until we had crossed, that all the peoples of the earth may know that the land, or that the hand of the Lord is mighty, so that you may fear the Lord your God forever.

Joshua chapter 4. It is at least noteworthy of mentioning that when the nation crosses the Jordan River, when they are on the eastern side, that is, outside the promised land, it is spoken as if they go down.

[7 : 49] It says they go down into the Jordan. When they come into the land of promise, it says that they go up out of the Jordan. They're going down and up, and it's the same wording that we have even in baptism, going down and being raised up.

We also know that there's this Jordan Rift, this valley in which they are crossing, and we know from chapter 3 that the Jordan is at flood stage, and we know from chapter 4 exactly what day they cross, and we'll get to that in just a moment.

A lot of this coincides with the fact that there was flax on the roof of Rahab the harlot, because this is a springtime crossing. This is the least likely time that anybody would cross the Jordan River.

If you were to go to the land of Israel today, and you looked at the Jordan River, it would not look very, at least difficult to cross because of man-made dams and water stoppages all up and down it, but even in its day before those constructions, the Jordan most times of the year would be easily crossed, but during flood stage, nobody crossed it.

God brought his people across it at flood stage, and we see that in chapter 3 and even in chapter 4 because it says the water returned, overflowing its banks as before. But I want you to see in Joshua chapter 4, stones of testimony.

[8 : 58] The raising up of stones of testimony. Here is one of those Ebenezers, as Samuel would refer to it. Here I raise my Ebenezer. That's so much more than a song.

That's a scriptural verse, right? And Ebenezer is a stone of help. Samuel says, Here I raise my Ebenezer, for thus far the Lord has helped me. It is that reality that the Ebenezer would be a testimony to a thing that God has done, and an individual could look back and say, God helped me that far.

This is why I raised it. This is one of a number of stones, of memorials that the nation of Israel will set up. They will set up the two testimonial stones, which Moses commanded them to do at the end of the book of Deuteronomy, the stone of blessing and the stone of curses.

They will write the law on these stones. Later on, they will proceed forth, and they will raise up other memorial stones. There will be a heap of stones over where Achan and his family die.

Not every stone of heap, or every stone of memorial, will be a time of joy. Some of it will be times of mourning. But here we have stones of testimony, and the reality to which they testify to.

[10 : 09] God tells us very clearly that these stones were to be piled up in a heap, not only just so that the people who were alive that day could look at them, but for future generations to see them. It says that that way, when the father's children ask them, what do these stones, and I love the way the New American Standard says it, and the first mentioning of it, it says, what do these stones mean to you?

Not just what do they mean. It says in the very first mentioning of it, in verse six, let this be a sign among you so that when your children ask you later, saying, what do these stones mean to you? What is the testimony to you? As to the reason why these stones are here. This was to be a stone of testimony, or twelve stones of testimony, that were to speak to the reality to the individual, so that the individual could pass his faith down to the next generation.

Scripture is very prevalent with the mentioning of generational heritage, and passing it down to the generations that come after us. This is why we see the reality that our great problem in the world today is not a sin problem.

The great problem in the world today has always been a sin problem. It is always a sin issue. It is because of a lack of godliness in those passing it down to the next generation.

[11 : 28] It is when we begin to separate and allow each generation to determine for their own selves what is true, or what is right, or what is proper, and we forget to pass that down and to tell you what this means to me.

What do these stones mean to you? But I want you to see four great truths of these stones of testimony. First, they speak, and they testify to the reality of a people united.

If you'll notice, in Joshua chapter 3, there is this passing mentioning that Joshua chose twelve men, and then it moves on, because in Joshua 3, they are really concerned with the instructions of when the ark moves, you move, and before the ark moved, Joshua chose twelve men.

We are not told until we get into the fourth chapter why Joshua chose those twelve men. We know that Joshua is obeying completely and entirely the commands of the Lord, so God must have told him beforehand that he's going to need these twelve men.

We are told in Joshua chapter 4, by the way, this is one of the contradictory remarks that people say. This shows that the book of Joshua was written by a number of authors, and it doesn't seem to coincide, but just because we don't know all the details at the first doesn't mean that they weren't known to those who were doing them, okay?

[12 : 38] We're so thankful that God tells us later why Joshua chose those twelve men. He chose those twelve men, and we understand why later, because this is after they crossed that Joshua took these twelve men whom he had chosen before and told them, now go back to where the priests were standing and choose for yourself twelve stones.

Now, I do know much. I don't know a whole lot, but I do know at least this much about riverbeds that if it had not been dry, you would not have really got those stones, right?

God dried it up enough to even give you the stones that's on the bottom of the river. And we see here a people united because notice, it is one from each tribe. Now, not all twelve tribes are going to live in the land of Canaan because two and a half of them live on the eastern side.

But the testimony, the pile of stones, was to be a representation that though the river may divide them, the Lord had united them.

It was to testify to the reality that though they may not be living side by side, though they may not all be inhabiting even the same geographical region, they were united in calling.

[13 : 46] They were united through their positioning with the Lord, their God. We see this rampant in the Old Testament and in particular, we see it immediately following the Babylonian captivity.

If you remember, even before the Babylonian captivity, you remember when Elijah went out to have his showdown on Mount Carmel with the prophets of Baal. You remember that, right? The kingdom was already divided.

There was a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom. Do you know how many stones Elijah put in his altar? Twelve. By the way, these are not trick questions. They all have the same answer, right?

Twelve stones. And the reason that Elijah put twelve stones on his altar is because he called upon the God of Israel, not just the God of Judah. He called upon the God of all of his people.

Every time there is an altar built of uncut stones as God had commanded, the number of stones is always twelve. Following the Babylonian captivity when the kingdom was absolutely divided because the northern kingdom fell first, which was the kingdom of Israel, that was the northern kingdom, that were the ten tribes who separated after the reign of Solomon.

[14 : 56] The ten tribes fell first to the Assyrian Empire. You remember that, right? They fell very early and about 200 years later, the southern kingdom, referred to as Judah, fell to the Babylonian Empire.

So they went to two different geographical regions. The northern kingdoms were carried away off to Assyria. The southern kingdoms were carried away into Babylon. Babylon. And then there was this issue of King Cyrus who issued a decree that the people could go back.

And the people that went back, the majority of them were of the southern kingdom because they came out of the Babylonian region, right? And when they rebuilt the altar, they rebuilt it with how many stones? Twelve.

Because in the economy of God, his people are never divided. Though man creates schisms and divisions, God always sees unity.

This reminds us in this testimony that though man may create a separation, God calls us as one. Friend, listen to me. There is one church.

[15 : 59] One church. In scripture, God speaks of his church, singular, and of churches, local.

Those churches are a part of the church. Unfortunately, this name has been hijacked and used to represent a denomination.

Historically, it was referred to the Catholic Church. Catholic meaning one true church. Not the denomination, but the unity. When we gather around the throne of heaven, diverse in language, diverse in color, diverse in past, we're going to gather as one true church, one united people from every tribe, every tongue, every nation, and praise his name because God is in the business of uniting, not dividing.

And we see this. They are a people united. They've left a large number of people behind, but the testimony is they are people united.

The second testimony that we see from this stone pile is that there is a place inhabited because God told them to take the 12 men, to take 12 stones from the riverbed, and to take those 12 stones, and to put them at the place where they lodged that night.

[17 : 25] And that would be a testimony to the reality that they were lodging or staying in the right place. As we introduced this, we said this is really the crossing.

How they cross is not so important as the fact that they did cross because this is the fulfillment of God's promise and purpose. This is a testimony that God brought them into the land.

They went down into the Jordan River, a wilderness wandering people. They came out of the Jordan River, a nation inhabiting a land. Only two references on the other side of the Jordan River are they referred to as a nation.

Once they go into the land of Canaan, they are repeatedly referred to as a nation. Now they are a nation, a united people as God's people inhabiting the land that he had presented to them and purposed and predestined for them.

This is the place of his choosing. This is where he wanted them to be. And we see that these stones are a memorial and a testimony to the fact that they were there. They were there.

[18 : 24] Now the location is Gilgal because where they stayed that night is Gilgal. It is about one and a quarter miles away from Jericho. Gilgal is not a place of battle. They don't fight there.

They don't, we'll see what they do there in the next chapter in chapter 5. But this is where they stay. This is the first place they stay the night. This is a testimony to the reality that they are now inhabiting their land.

They are in Gilgal. And Gilgal becomes a very, very important place in the history of the nation of Israel. It is at Gilgal that they anoint their first king, Saul. It is at Gilgal that David is welcomed back after his return from Absalom's rebellion.

It is at Gilgal that a lot of things take place and a lot of events happen and there's this stone of testimony over here just reminding them that this is our land. This is where God has brought us. This is where he has put us. He did bring us here. And you remember my message this morning about the danger of an elevated heritage. Because if you read the prophets Hosea and Amos you will also find that Gilgal becomes a place of idolatrous worship.

[19 : 25] they began to elevate the position and really forget about the God who brought them to that place and worship other gods. And the minor prophets rebuked them for their false worship that was taking place at Gilgal.

Because what should have been a testimony to the fact that God brought us to this place ended up becoming a good place to play the harlot with false gods. How easy it is to take something that is meant to be good and turning it into something that becomes desperately wicked.

But it is a testimony of a place inhabited. God had brought them in and we know he brought them in because they put the stones there. Have you ever seen something?

Maybe you feel like you're going somewhere that maybe nobody's ever been. You're walking through a place and it doesn't seem like it's very inhabited and I like walking around the woods and some of you like walking around the woods.

Have you ever come up on something and you say there's no doubt somebody's been here before me because there's something put there that is so unique. So odd. Somebody put it there.

[20 : 38] I remember reading Franklin Graham's book Rebel with a Cause. Maybe you've read it. It's an old book. Franklin Graham speaks to the reality that when God got his attention he was walking down a country road and he was walking down a road and he happened to look at a fence post and sitting on the top of a fence post was a turtle.

And he said and it stopped me in my tracks because all of a sudden I realized somebody put that turtle there. That turtle didn't get there on its own. And God says you're that turtle.

You didn't just happen to be here. I put you here. These stones testify to the reality that God has brought them to that place. He put them there. And they set it up to testify to that reality.

God did what he said he was going to do. Stones don't pile up by themselves. They're there. And they're testifying to the reality that they inhabit the place God has promised.

Number three. We see a power demonstrated. These stones testify to the reality that power has been demonstrated in their crossing of the Jordan River because of where these stones came from.

[21 : 51] We see that they testified to the reality that they took them from the bottom of the Jordan River. We'll get to the other one in just a minute. I haven't skipped over it. Stay with me. And he tells us at the end of the chapter the reason they were to set it up is so that when their children ask and they can testify to this reality for the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed and just as the Lord your God had done to the Red Sea.

And he says this when he dried up before us until we had crossed that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty. See that stone that pile of stones was not simply just

to testify to the nation of Israel it was to be a testimony to a looking world or a watching world and it was to be a testimony to the inhabitants of that land that God is mighty.

The hand of God is a mighty God and we can prove it at flood stage on a particular day at the right time God dried it up we walked across dry ground we took these stones out of the bottom of that river and here they are to testify to the reality that God is strong enough and those who knew could always look back and they could look back at that Ebenezer this stone of help and they could say if God could help me then God can help me now if his power was true then his power is true now see they testified to a power demonstrated and they do so not just so that a world could be drawn to him they do so so that his people could stay true to him because it ends with this so that you may fear the Lord your God forever that you may fear the Lord your God forever see the power demonstrated was to be a testimony of attraction to the world and a testimony of caution to the people of God his hand is mighty it is strong he can do what he says he's going to do so we may fear the Lord our God forever this testifies to the reality of his power that has been demonstrated and it hasn't been hidden it hasn't been something that was done in secret it was done in the open and it's right there and this is the thing that they've heard about in Jericho it's caused all the men to quiver and shake and to tremble and fear and understand this reality

God puts his power on display and he causes his people to raise up testimonial signs to it he wants them to see this and I wonder what the testimonial signs in our life that display the power of God that has been demonstrated too often we forget about them too often we neglect them too often we cast them aside that power is there to attract but also to offer caution he is the God who can he is the God who did he is the God who deserves our steadfast devotion now fourth and finally probably the greatest testimony of this pile of rocks it is a testimony to a past covered some see contradiction here but I don't think there's contradiction most biblical scholars do not see contradiction because they understand it as it reads there are two piles of stone one is a visible display a gilgal in which the twelve men carried on their shoulders and set them down that is the one that is to be displayed so that your children could ask what do these stones mean to you and it would be a testimony the other one is a testimony to the inner man because it says that Joshua went down and put twelve other stones in the middle of the Red Sea where the feet of the priests were standing now those stones were going to be covered as soon as the priests came out and the waters went back nobody saw them anymore he didn't put them there for the world to see he didn't put them there for the children to see but the author says they are still there to this day they're at the bottom of the Red Sea they're there because see this is a testimony to the reality that we're different because we came through here they testify to a new beginning we went down but we came up and he put stones down there to remind them that they went in one way they came out another way and God did something amazing there it testifies to a new beginning and to clarify the testimony of the new beginning of the past being covered of a new day dawning no longer rebellious wilderness wandering people now a faithful moving forward victorious people

I know they will fail but at this moment they're moving forward in faith right no longer are they who they used to be no longer are they defined by those who failed to go in now they are those who went in no longer are they the generation who said all our children will die now they're the generation says God told us we're going see their past is covered and to show it look did you notice the day that they went in it tells us in verse 19 now the people came up from the Jordan on the 10th of the first month do you know what the 10th day of the first month is you want to know right that's the day they chose the lamb that they would slay on the 14th day for the Passover that's the day they would pick the lamb from the flock and say in 4 days we observe the

[27 : 34] Passover that's the day when they said we're picking the lamb that's blood will be shed for the remission of our sins that have taken place this past year the 10th day of the first month the day of new beginning God says this shall be the first month to you when they leave exodus because all things are new the 14th day of the first month is the day of Passover on the 10th day they were to choose the lamb and observe the lamb so that they could make sure that lamb was spotless and perfect and blameless so that when that lamb!

died they knew they were offering up a perfect sacrifice so that its blood could serve as a remission for their sins what do they do they observe the Passover God is showing them your past is forgiven in this land all things are made new all things are made new we've seen the reality that the crossing of the Jordan river is not really a picture of the believer going into heaven rather it is a picture of the believer entering into the fullness of Christ he is our Passover lamb the day we enter into the

fullness of Christ all things remain new we left something at the bottom of the river we left the old man there there's a testimony on the other side but there's also that testimony of the back there's that thing that nobody sees in my own life I speak of the reality of who I story not that I glory and what God called me from but those stones are still there at the bottom of the river because they testify to the reality of what he has covered and may I not ever forget there are things he covered because the moment I begin to forget that there are things that I left at the bottom that he covered I begin to think that I was worth saving and all things have been made new because of the spotless blood of the lamb there was a day in which that lamb was chosen for me and my past is covered see these stones of testimony not too long ago I was talking to my uncle calverts have a way of delaying things we are procrastinators by nature we we tend to get around to things I felt pretty good because some had taken me longer than

I planned and my uncle told me he said well I started working on that rock wall again he got into we're also strange sometimes we work harder not smarter he got into cutting rocks with the old tools where you twist and turn twist and turn twist and turn he said I started working on he said you know I did the math the other day I been working on that rock wall for 16 years I said well it's about time you get it done but he made a comment to me and it really spoke to me when I said he said one thing I found out though when you work with rock your material never wears out it doesn't matter if it takes you a hundred years that's still a rock it's not like wood it's not they're the same it doesn't go away because God is consistent what he was on the day when they piled those twelve stones up is the same thing he is today does not change does not fade does not falter does not rot he does not change let's pray

Lord thank you thank you for this day thank you for the testimony of your power and reality in our lives may we continuously glory in all that you've done in and through and for us and we ask it in Christ's name amen if you're able and want to stand we're going to close with page 140 down at the cross page 140 and and to and to to and to to to and to to to and to to to!

[33 : 41] to and to to to to to and to to!