

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 4

JOSHUA

CHAPTER 4

Memory Verse for the week – Joshua 4:23-24 – *“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: 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.”*

INTRODUCTION

The children of Israel had crossed the Jordan River by the miraculous hand of God. The presence of the LORD as represented by “the ark of covenant” led the way. The priests who carried “the ark of the covenant” stood on dry ground in the middle of the riverbed. All the Israelites walked across the dry riverbed and entered the Promised

Land. Chapter 4 gives more details of the crossing of the Jordan River.

The crossing by the Israelites is elaborated in this chapter. The purpose of the twelve men whom Joshua was commanded to choose one from each tribe, is now given. Each of them was instructed to pick up a large stone from the riverbed and carry it to the other side of the river to be erected as a monument. The campaign to conquer the Land has begun. There is no turning back. The Crossing of the Jordan signals the start of a conquest that was 40 years too late. The failure of the previous generation must be the lesson to the present generation of the importance of success. They must not fail the LORD.

It was a glorious crossing and now for the first time they found themselves standing on the Land of Promise. The dream has become a reality at long last! But the battle has just begun. There was still the Land before them that requires conquering. Stoutness of heart is required. Strength and courage of faith are indispensable if Israel were to succeed.

Many precious lessons can be learned from this chapter.

The chapter can be divided into the following sections:

- 1) Twelve Stones (vv.1-9);
- 2) Crossing Over (vv.10-13);

- 3) Joshua Magnified (vv. 14-18);
- 4) What Mean ye these Stones? (vv.19-24);

COMMENTARY

Twelve Stones – 4:1-9

The children of Israel accomplished the task of crossing the Jordan River in the way prescribed by the LORD. Each of the twelve men carried a large stone for the erection of a monument. These were ordinary men not necessarily leaders. The reason was possibly because this was an ordinary altar for the whole nation and ordinary stones were used for the memorial. The stones were also quite heavy as they had to carry them on their shoulders. They were not hewn stones at all. The stones were picked from the very place where the priests stood bearing “the ark of the covenant”. The monument of twelve stones was for the purpose of reminding future generations what truly happened to the children of Israel at this point of their history. Joshua erected it. Ordinary men carried ordinary stones making an ordinary altar reminding a nation of the extraordinary miracle performed by the Most High God to begin the conquest of the Cis-Jordan area.

They were to deposit the stones in the place where they settled that night. Meanwhile, it is written that the priests who were bearing “the ark of the covenant” “stood firm” in the middle of the river until all had passed over (v.3). The priests had to ensure that the Ark of the Covenant was held steadily until ALL Israel has crossed. They must not drop the ark. The people of Israel did their part to cross quickly without any delay. The Bible said “the people hasted and passed over” (v.10b). They were entering the Promised Land occupied by strong and mighty enemies. Israel was not on a holiday trip where casual strolling was allowed. All Israel realized that this was a military march and not a holiday stroll.

The twelve men put the stones from the Jordan River at the place where the LORD commanded Joshua to do. It was the place where they would lodge that night. Once again, the text indicates that Joshua was an obedient servant – “the LORD spake to Joshua, saying” (v.1b), “then Joshua called the twelve men” (v.4a). And again the writer highlights the fact that “the children of Israel did so as Joshua commanded” (v.8a). They obeyed Joshua as they had promised. This kind of submission and cooperation among the people towards their leaders is essential in

advancing the work of God. Remember your membership oath?

According to Joshua, the stones were used to build a memorial. It was for the purpose of reminding future generations that their fathers came into this Land through the miraculous crossing of the over flowing River Jordan. The LORD made it possible and the manner it was accomplished was *“that the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over Jordan, the waters were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever”* (vv.6,7).

God’s command to the children of Israel to erect a memorial is noteworthy. Humans have a tendency to forget their history when they are pre-occupied with the demands and pressures of the present. Hence, memorial stones were erected to remind and help them to know their roots. In the case of Israel, the twelve stones not only reminded them of what happened in the history of their nation, but also to learn that they depended on the LORD their God. They crossed the Jordan River not because of their own ability, power or strength but because of God.

Joshua then set up twelve stones where the priests stood holding the Ark. **Joshua 4:9** – *“And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of*

Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests which bare the ark of the covenant stood: and they are there unto this day.” What is the significance of this? Although there is no record that the LORD told Joshua to do this but this act of Joshua could not be wrong or sinful since the LORD did not rebuke him or it.¹ The significance of this act was possibly to remind Israel the exact spot where the Ark of the Covenant was located when Israel crossed the Jordan. These stones also affirm that the previous 12 stones that the two and one half tribes located in the Trans-Jordan region are part of Israel. These stones were placed there before the priests came out of the Jordan.

The number twelve is also significant. When the conquest is over, the two and one half tribes would return to their families and their own land. It could be that with time, Israel might forget that they were 12 and not 9 tribes. These memorial stones will always remind them that the River Jordan is not a divider of the nation of Israel but merely a life giving river of water to water both sides of the united nation.

The Crossing Over – 4:10-13

The text emphasizes that the children of Israel had accomplished

¹ NOTE-When the two and one half tribes returned

the crossing of the river. They had been faithful and obedient, both the priests and the people, and the twelve strong men. The priests had to bear “the ark of the covenant” until every one had crossed over to the other side. [NOTE—It is significant that the last one to “cross” the River Jordan was the LORD. The LORD went in first via the Ark and the LORD ensured that the last Israelite was cared for before the Jordan River returned to her previous overflowing state.]

The tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh had earlier been reminded of their promise to aid their fellow brethren in conquering the Land of Promise. The preposition “before” should be understood in a spatial sense, that is “in the sight of” (v.12). They kept their promise before the LORD. These forty thousand armed and able men took positions in the plains of Jericho.² Since their loved ones were back home on the other side, they did not have to attend to their women and children and old folks. This ensured a security cover for the children of Israel to cross over safely to the other side should any group of the inhabitants of the land

² If we take the census taken by Moses of able men over 20 years of age: Reuben numbered 43,730 eligible men (Numbers 26:7); Gad numbered 40,500 (Numbers 26:18); and the half-tribe of Manasseh 52,700 (Numbers 26:34); that is a total of 146, 930 men. So, forty thousand is about a third of them who crossed over to the other side.

decide to attack them. A picture of unity and oneness in spirit was deservedly evident. Nevertheless, the final accountability for their actions should be attributed to the divine appointed leader. A church can learn from the example of these people about planning and doing the work of God together. The results of such spirit and unity are immeasurable indeed.

Joshua magnified – 4:14-18

The crossing of the Jordan River was complete. The LORD exalted Joshua before the children of Israel as He had said to him earlier. The effect was that the children of Israel respected him just as they had respected Moses. They finally accepted Joshua as the legitimate successor of Moses. The crossing was Joshua’s first of many responsibilities. The LORD next instructed Joshua to command the priests who carried “the ark of the covenant” to come out of the Jordan River. Again Joshua obeyed implicitly.

When the feet of the priests stepped on the other side of the Land, the waters of Jordan River returned to its former overflowing torrents. The timing of this could not be considered as a coincidence. It has to be a miracle, which can only be wrought by God. This demonstrates the power of God to control natural forces. When Jesus Christ was on earth, the winds

and the seas obeyed Him when He commanded them to cease and there was a calm.³

**What mean ye these stones?
– 4:19-24**

It was the tenth day of the first month of the Jewish calendar that the children of Israel, after crossing the Jordan River, encamped in Gilgal. Gilgal was situated about two kilometres on the north-east of Jericho. The tenth day of the first month was a significant day. It was the same date when the Israelites made preparations for the Passover feast recorded in Exodus 12:2-3 – *“This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house:”* Israel partook the Passover feast four days later, on the evening of the fourteenth (Exodus 12:6). So the date on which they encamped in Gilgal envisaged their observance of the Passover feast.

³Luke 8:23- 24, “But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled *with water*, and were in jeopardy. And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm.”

This was exactly thirty-nine years later that they resumed the keeping of the Passover feast! The first Passover feast commemorated the end of Israel’s bondage in Egypt and the start of a new life, which God intended for them in the Promised Land. Finally, they had set foot on the Land, which Moses desired so much to enter but was not allowed. It too would spell the beginning of a new life for the nation. Gilgal (meaning “roll away”) became Israel’s base of operations into the interior regions of the Land.

The divine writer returned to the theme of the twelve memorial stones. It was therefore of great importance since the duty of the parents was mentioned again concerning the purpose of erecting the memorial stones. They must tell their children whenever they were asked concerning the monument. The children must know the history of their nation, and their roots. Their future generations must know that the LORD their God dried up the waters of Jordan just as He had done to the Red Sea in the sight of the people. And another purpose for the memorial stones was that the whole world might know the Almighty power of the LORD (YaHWeH), and that they might fear the LORD their God for ever (v.24). How important it is for people to know their roots – what and who they are and where they came from. It will

preserve their identity, strengthen their own community and establish a meaningful existence among the other nations. God knows about people because He is the Creator of man. He knows that man has the tendency to forget, and man must be reminded to know the LORD their God and be grateful and thankful to Him for all that He has blessed him with.

PRACTICAL VALUE

Joshua chapters three and four illustrate the qualities of humility, obedience, steadfastness and patience coupled with the spirit of unity of hearts and minds that are essential ingredients to victorious Christian living. For example the priests willing took orders from Joshua and stepped out in faith as they began the crossing. They remained in the middle of the Jordan trusting in the LORD to stay the waters of the fast flowing Jordan up north as Israel crossed.

These same qualities were also evident in Joshua. He implicitly obeyed all that the LORD commanded him. Never once did he talk back or argue with God; the LORD instructed him, he obeyed and carried out what he had to do.

The people were exemplary in their willingness to submit to the leadership of Joshua, and cooperated

in the spirit of unity to get the task done. The point is this that we as Christians should always do everything in our power to make the work of God easier for God's servants. Not to mention that the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh also showed the same spirit. In addition, we must recognize that as Christians, we are truly engaged in a spiritual warfare. Our enemy is the devil with his agents, and he seeks any one, particularly Christians, to destroy with impunity. Therefore, we must stay together, work together and help one another.

Another obvious thing is the memorial. How important it is for people to keep memorial lest we forget some important experiences in our life that have given us inner strength and encouragement. Knowing the children of Israel, God insisted that they erect a monument of twelve stones to remind them and to teach their children and their children's children what the LORD their God had done for them, and in so remembering they might become strong and courageous. God's visual aids serve to remind His people important experiences in their lives.

Last but not least, we must exercise faith in God when we do His work. Obstacles, difficulties and hardships will abound. But we must not be deterred. Search His precious

Word to do His perfect will and step out in faith trusting Him like Joshua for every provision of our needs. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Joshua 4:1-9; Exodus 12:26-27; Deuteronomy 6:20-25.

TUESDAY: Joshua 4:10-13; Numbers 32:1-31.

WEDNESDAY: Joshua 4:14-18; 1 Peter 5:1-6.

THURSDAY: Joshua 4:19-24; Exodus 12:1-10.

FRIDAY: Joshua 4:1-24; Colossians 2:6-15; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the significance of a memorial? Are there memorials today for the Christian?

2. Is it important or necessary to magnify a leader today? Explain your answer.

3. How important is the truth that the LORD goes ahead of you to fight your spiritual battles and remains behind to ensure that the weaker ones are not left behind?

4. Are you a cooperative person? Do you work well alone or with others? Is it important for a Christian to work well with others? Explain.

5. What have you learned about God or His Will in this chapter?

6. Explain the meaning of, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities"? See Eph. 6:11-12.
