

Sunday Night Message

December 3, 2017

Joshua 4 – *What Mean Ye By These Stones*

Series – Joshua

Text – Joshua 4

Introduction

In our text today, we will follow the children of Israel as they cross the Jordan River and prepare for the conquest of Jericho. The first thing that Joshua commands them to do after they cross was to erect a memorial – actually two memorials. It is awesome that the people of God are faithful to remember what God has done for them. Here, they set up a memorial to remind them in future generations that God stopped the flow of water upstream and brought them across the Jordan River on dry ground.

God is all about remembering:

Biblical Examples:

The Passover

"And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever." - (Exodus 12:11-14)

The Lord's Supper

"And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." - (1 Corinthians 11:24-26)

God warned the Israelites not to forget Him:

"And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which

thou buildest not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." - (Deuteronomy 6:10-12)

God doesn't like it when we forget what He has done for us. That is why He has set up occasions for memorials – reminders.

By the way – God doesn't forget us either.

"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." - (Hebrews 6:10)

According to Hebrews 6:10 – it is unrighteous – it is sin – to forget what God and others have done for us.

Forgetting begins with a lack of reflection, and results in a lack of appreciation.

As we will see in the text, it is up to the parents to make sure that these memorials are remembered and understood by children. (See also Deuteronomy 6)

God's people are certainly right to memorialize things to help them remember and appreciate what God has done, but we must never let our memorials turn into idols.

In our story, we will see that the memorial is set up in Gilgal. The Israelites would be rebuked by the Lord later for the idolatry that takes place in Gilgal. Perhaps their memorial turned into an idol. (see also Hosea 4:5; 9:15; Amos 4:4)

"Is there iniquity in Gilead? surely they are vanity: they sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal; yea, their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields." (Hosea 12:11)

"But seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought." (Amos 5:5)

The danger of the symbol of the Cross is that it can become an idol.

The brazen serpent that Moses made to heal the people of Israel eventually became an idol.

"He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan." (2 Kings 18:4)

I **Stones Taken from the Jordan River for the Lord's Memorial (vs. 1 – 8)**

"And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over Jordan, that the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying," (Joshua 4:1)

The narrative will now reveal what took place as the Israelites were crossing over Jordan.

"Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man," (Joshua 4:2)

These are the twelve men that were selected in Joshua 3:12. Chapters 3 – 5 really are one continuous narrative.

"And command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night." (Joshua 4:3)

"Then Joshua called the twelve men, whom he had prepared of the children of Israel, out of every tribe a man:" (Joshua 4:4)

"And Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of Jordan, and take ye up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel:" (Joshua 4:5)

"That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones?" (Joshua 4:6)

"Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever." (Joshua 4:7)

"And the children of Israel did so as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones out of the midst of Jordan, as the LORD spake unto Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over with them unto the place where they lodged, and laid them down there." (Joshua 4:8)

II Stones Taken to the Jordan River for Joshua's Memorial (vs. 9 – 14)

"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." (Joshua 4:9)

There has been much debate about this second memorial by Bible teachers. Some deny that there was a second memorial, claiming that the word the phrase "in the midst of Jordan", should have been translated "from the midst of Jordan". This would make this whole section parenthetical.

However, most conservative scholars do not see a problem with two memorials at all. In fact, they see a wonderful picture in the two memorials. The memorial that remained buried in the midst of the Jordan River under the water represents the Israel prior to this point, with all of the failures of the past being buried. The memorial on the other side represents Israel in the new land with a brand-new life ahead of them. In a sense, this is also a foreshadowing of the death and resurrection of Christ.

The whole wilderness wandering and final entering into Canaan paints many pictures:

The deliverance from Egypt is a picture of salvation.

The crossing of the Red Sea is a picture of baptism.

The wilderness wanderings are a picture of the believer's sanctification, as he learns to deny the flesh and walk in the Spirit.

Finally, the entering into the Promised Land is a picture of the Spirit-filled Christian life.

Wiersbe comments:

The monument at Gilgal reminded the Jews that God had opened the Jordan River and brought them safely across into the Promised Land. They had made a break with the past and were never to think of going back. The monument in the depths of the river reminded them that their old life was buried and they were now to "walk in newness of life".¹

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:1-4)

McGee said:

My friend, may I say to you that Christ went into death for you and me, and that is set before us here in the Book of Joshua. Twelve stones were put into the water of death. Those twelve stones were placed in Jordan to speak of the death of Christ. And the twelve stones taken out of Jordan and put on the west bank of the river represent the resurrection of Christ.²

"For the priests which bare the ark stood in the midst of Jordan, until every thing was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to speak unto the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua: and the people hastened and passed over." (Joshua 4:10)

"And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over, that the ark of the LORD passed over, and the priests, in the presence of the people." (Joshua 4:11)

"And the children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, passed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses spake unto them:" (Joshua 4:12)

"About forty thousand prepared for war passed over before the LORD unto battle, to the plains of Jericho." (Joshua 4:13)

"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." (Joshua 4:14)

This is the fulfillment of what God had promised in Joshua 3:7. As the people learned to respect Moses because they saw the hand of God on him, they also learned to revere Joshua.

III The Waters Return to the Jordan River (vs. 15 – 18)

"And the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying," (Joshua 4:15)

"Command the priests that bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan." (Joshua 4:16)

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). Be Strong (p. 54). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² McGee, J. V. (1997). Thru the Bible commentary (electronic ed., Vol. 2, p. 10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

"Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan." (Joshua 4:17)

"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." (Joshua 4:18)

IV The Purpose of the First Memorial (vs. 19 – 24)

A So the Israelites Would Remember God (vs. 19 – 22)

"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." (Joshua 4:19)

"And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal." (Joshua 4:20)

Wiersbe comments on the significance of Gilgal:

In later years Gilgal became an important center for the nation. Israel crowned their first king at Gilgal (1 Sam. 11); there David was welcomed back after Absalom's rebellion was subdued (2 Sam. 19); and Samuel thought Gilgal important enough to include it in his "ministry circuit" (1 Sam. 7:16). There was a "school of the prophets" at Gilgal in the days of Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2:1–2; 4:38). Gilgal was important to Joshua because it became his camp and center of operations (Josh. 9:6; 10:6, 15, 43; 14:6).³

"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?" (Joshua 4:21)

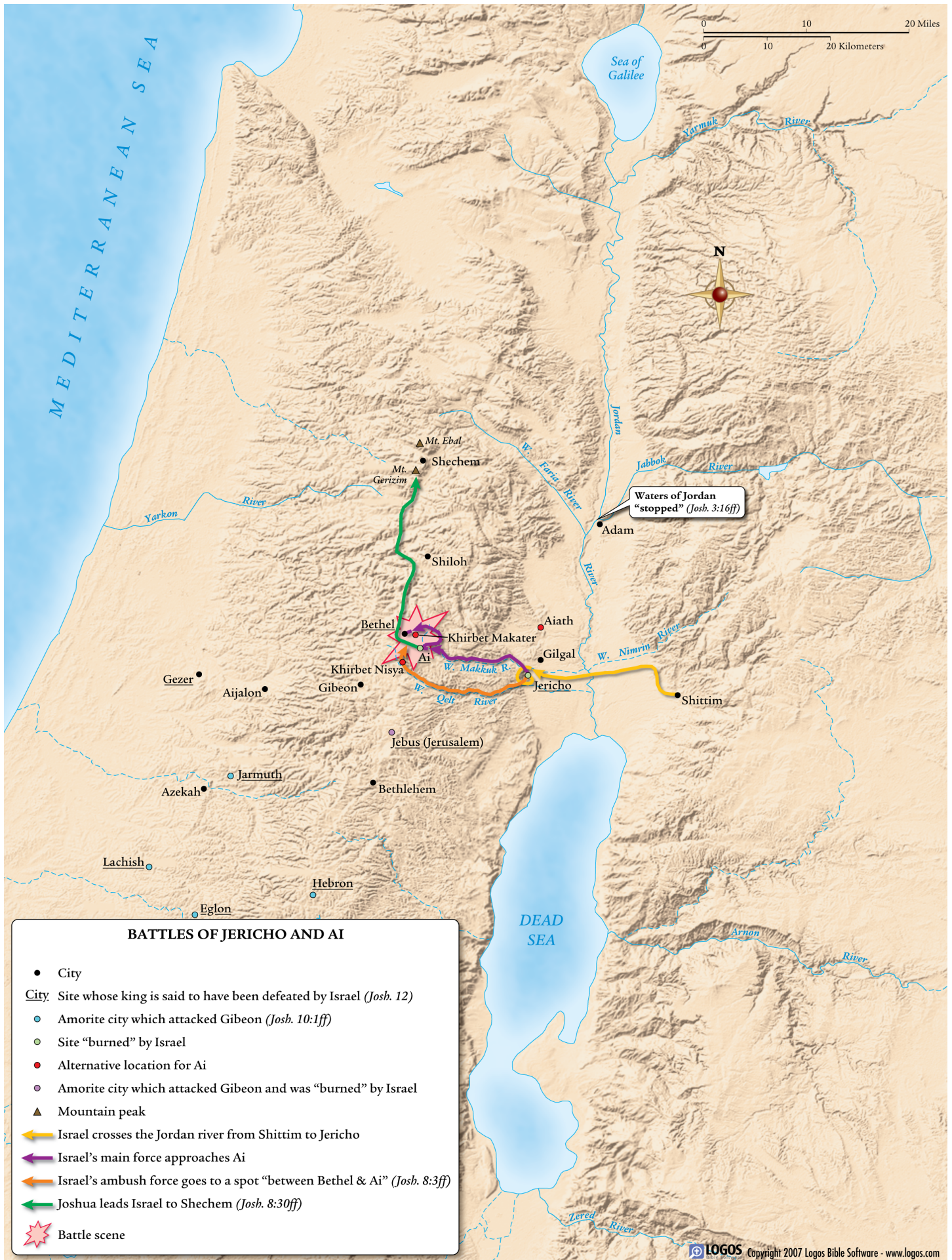
"Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land." (Joshua 4:22)

B So the World Would Know the Power of Israel's God (vs. 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:" (Joshua 4:23)

"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." (Joshua 4:24)

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Strong* (pp. 52–53). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.



BATTLES OF JERICHO AND AI

- City
- City. Site whose king is said to have been defeated by Israel (*Josh. 12*)
- Amorite city which attacked Gibeon (*Josh. 10:1ff*)
- Site "burned" by Israel
- Alternative location for Ai
- Amorite city which attacked Gibeon and was "burned" by Israel
- ▲ Mountain peak
- Israel crosses the Jordan river from Shittim to Jericho
- Israel's main force approaches Ai
- Israel's ambush force goes to a spot "between Bethel & Ai" (*Josh. 8:3ff*)
- Joshua leads Israel to Shechem (*Josh. 8:30ff*)
- ★ Battle scene