



Joshua 4
Here I Raise My Ebenezer

NKJ Joshua 4:1 And it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over the Jordan, that the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying:

2 "Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from every tribe,

3 "and command them, saying, 'Take for yourselves twelve stones from here, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet stood firm. You shall carry them over with you and leave them in the lodging place where you lodge tonight.' "

4 Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the children of Israel, one man from every tribe;

5 and Joshua said to them: "Cross over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel,

6 "that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, 'What do these stones *mean* to you?'

7 "Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever."

8 And the children of Israel did so, just as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan, as the LORD had spoken to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there.

9 Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood; and they are there to this day.

10 So the priests who bore the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished 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 over.

11 Then it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over, that the ark of the LORD and the priests crossed over in the presence of the people.

12 And the men of Reuben, the men of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh crossed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses had spoken to them.

13 About forty thousand prepared for war crossed 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 feared him, as they had feared Moses, all the days of his life.

15 Then the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying,

16 "Command the priests who bear the ark of the Testimony to come up from the Jordan."

17 Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, "Come up from the Jordan."

18 And it came to pass, when the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD had come from the midst of the Jordan, *and* the soles of the priests' feet touched the dry land, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks as before.

19 Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth *day* of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho.

20 And those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal.

21 Then he spoke to the children of Israel, saying: "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What *are* these stones?'

22 "then you shall let your children know, saying, 'Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land';

23 "for the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over,

24 "that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever."

Here in Joshua, we are at the beginning of the invasion of Canaan. Central to the story is going to be the success of these early campaigns against the inhabitants of the land. There will be set-backs, caused by the disobedience of the people, but by and large the people will come a long way towards gaining the full measure of the inheritance that God is causing them. And that is perhaps the great theme of the book, the faithfulness of the Lord in delivering on his covenant promise to bring his people into the promise land, this land flowing with milk and honey.

What will be emphasized will be not only the unchanging faithfulness of the Lord, but as we have noted before the blessings that come to his people when they are faithful to their own obligations, when they remember the call of the Lord in chapter one - ***"Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go."***

Be faithful, be courageous, Remember the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Follow his commands.

If we zoom ahead though, to the next book in the bible, the flip-side of that theme is immediately evident, instead of the blessings that come through faith in God's promises and obedience to his commands, we see the curses that fall upon God's people for apostasy. But what is the trigger of that apostasy, what happens that turns joy to sorrow, rejoicing to weeping, success to failure?

Well turn in your bibles to chapter 2, we can read what the cause was there:

Judges 2:7 So the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD which He had done for Israel.

8 Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died when he was one hundred and ten years old.

9 And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash.

10 When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel.

**11 Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals;
12 and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger.**

The trigger is in verse 10 – Joshua's generation dies, and then up comes a new generation of Israelites living in the land of Canaan, *who didn't know the Lord nor the work which he had done for Israel*. A generation to whom the the plagues in Egypt, the Passover, the Crossing of the Red Sea, the Giving of the Law, the Manna in the wilderness, and even this amazing crossing in the promised land all meant nothing. A covenant people, who knew nothing of the God who made those covenant promises.

A while back, I had the opportunity to watch the movie *Excalibur* again either on A&E or AMC, I can't remember which, I just remember it was one of channels which cleans up the movie, which was a relief. Now the movie *Excalibur* is stolen by Nicol Williamson in his portrayal of Merlin, and there was one scene that struck me as it hadn't before. It is when Arthur's knights are returning to report that all the wars are over, all the battles won, and are congratulating one another. In the midst of their revelry, he calls them all to silence and then he has this memorable speech *"look upon this moment. Savor it! Rejoice with great gladness! Great gladness! Remember it always...For it is the doom of men that they forget."*

That statement could be safely and truthfully paraphrased "It is the undoing of God's People in every age that they forget" They forget their God, they forget what he did for them, they forget his commands, and they slowly but surely sink into compromise adopting the customs and the attitudes and then eventually the gods of the unbelievers in whose midst they are living.

That is why the Lord gives his people *memorials*. What is a memorial, it is something that serves to preserve remembrance. It is a physical reminder of something or someone that should be remembered, especially because of the terrible consequences of forgetting.

Often a memorial is something inscribed in stone, because stone unlike the human memory, has a lasting permanence it goes on and on. A granite gravestone recording your biographic details will outlive the memory of every human acquaintance you have. Often in the ancient middle east, memorials of great victories were inscribed on standing stones, called in Hebrew *Stones of Help – Eben Haezer – or Ebenezer*.

That is what the Lord wants his people to erect on the far bank of the Jordan, a memorial, an Ebenezer consisting of 12 stones, one each for all the tribes that crossed over that day. To remind the people forever of how it was He miraculously delivered on His Covenant promise to bring them into the Land. It's purpose isn't so much to remind the people who crossed over themselves, after all they were there, but rather he tells us who the memorial is primarily aimed at:

**Joshua 4:20 And those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal.
21 Then he spoke to the children of Israel, saying: "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?'
22 "then you shall let your children know, saying, 'Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land';**

23 "for the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over,

24 "that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever."

The sign was done for the sake of teaching, teaching all the people of the World about the mighty God, but in particular, the Ebenezer was there for the purpose of teaching the CHILDREN.

The Lord knows that we have gold fish memories, that we are subject to peer pressure, that we are slaves to fashion, and so he gives us reminders to try to help us to avoid forgetting what is so vital. Forgetting him forgetting the faith.

Dale Ralph David makes a good point along these lines when he says **"the greatest enemy of faith may be forgetfulness. Just as in a marriage, the real threat may not be infidelity but simply a slow process of forgetting and a gradual failure to remember the preciousness of the other person. So Joshua says, you must remember what Yahweh has done; and these stones are to server as visual aids to that end."**

So they cross and record both the event, and even the day, the 10th day of the 1st month, which was also, 40 years prior the same day that the Passover flight from Egypt had occurred, to remind them not to forget how they were delivered.

We are given the same kind of reminders to help us to avoid forgetting aren't we:

Lord's Supper – remind to you, remind to your kids, who even in the midst of it ask what its all about. Not What are these stones for? What is the wine for, what is the bread for? Reminds us of Christ's sacrifice.

There is also the weekly reminder, The **Lord's Day** – The Sabbath. Reminded us originally of creation, now recreation, saving work, that is why the attempts to dismantle this Ebenezer are so grievous.

Applications:

1) **Your Children:** Look at your children, your grandchildren, the children of this church. They are the next generation of Christians. Remember that the next generation in Judges 2 **forgot**. You may have had your red sea and your Jordan river experience, did they?

Erect Ebenezers in your households: *The Sabbath, Family Worship*

2) **You:** We are Goldfish, we are surrounded by distractions, never forget, raise your Ebenezers.