

Joshua 4

Read Joshua 4: God tells Joshua to memorialize his parting of the Jordan River by taking 12 stones from the middle of the Jordan riverbed, and then build a memorial for future generations. There were numerous biblical places where memorial stones were set up, but God specifically asked for this one.

It serves to prove to future generations that God kept his promise to the children of Israel. It was just like the parting of the Red Sea. It also added to the public credibility of Joshua as God's leader, and it cemented his role and respect among his people.

These memorial stones were set up in Gilgal. The word Gilgal describes a wheel that is rolling or in a circle. The name is significant, because it relates to the national circumcision that took place there. Circumcision is essentially a wheel cut. The spot was called Gibeath-haaraloth (hill of foreskins). That is a huge act of faith, as it would leave them defenseless for over a week, until they healed.

The act of circumcision is somewhat synonymous with compliance in the Mosaic Law. God compares an uncircumcised person to having a non-compliant heart towards God.

²⁵ "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "that I will punish all who are circumcised and yet uncircumcised—²⁶ Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all those inhabiting the desert who trim the hair on their temples; for all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart." (Jeremiah 9)

God was pointing out that the past generation which perished in the wilderness was faithless. He is showing the world that progress in life begins with embracing God and fearing him. It is to cut off any corrupting contacts. It is about holiness.

Each of the 12 tribes had a stone; and were included in this promise. Reuben, Gad and Manasseh had to cross the Jordan River first, because they took the land on the other side of the Jordan. They could not act as a discouragement to the others for settling for less.

Now the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad had a very large number of livestock. So when they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, that ^[a]it was indeed a place suitable for livestock, ² the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben came and spoke to Moses, Eleazar the priest, and to the leaders of the congregation, saying,

³ “Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon, ⁴ the land which the Lord ^[b]conquered before the congregation of Israel, is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock.” ⁵ And they said, “If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants as our property; do not take us across the Jordan.” ⁶ But Moses said to the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben, “Should your brothers go to war while you remain here? ⁷ And why are you discouraging the ^[c]sons of Israel from crossing over into the land which the Lord has given them? ⁸ This is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. ⁹ For when they went up to the ^[d]Valley of Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the ^[e]sons of Israel so that they did not go into the land which the Lord had given them. ¹⁰ So the Lord’s anger burned on that day, and He swore, saying, ¹¹ ‘None of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; for they did not follow Me fully, ¹² except Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun; for they have followed the Lord fully.’ ¹³ So the Lord’s anger burned against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness for forty years, until the entire generation of those who had done evil in the sight of the Lord came to an end. ¹⁴ Now behold, you have risen up in your fathers’ place, born of sinful men, to add still more to the burning anger of the Lord against Israel. ¹⁵ For if you turn away from following Him, He will once more leave them in the wilderness, and you will destroy all these people.” ¹⁶ Then they approached him and said, “We will build sheepfolds for our livestock here and cities for our little ones; ¹⁷ but we ourselves will be armed, hurrying ahead of the sons of Israel, until we have brought them to their place, while our little ones live in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land. ¹⁸ We will not return to our homes until every one of the sons of Israel has gained possession of his inheritance. ¹⁹ But we will not have an inheritance with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has come to us on this side of the Jordan toward the east.” (Numbers 32)