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Joshua 4

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Joshua 4.

Topics.

- Twelve men take a stone each from the middle of the Jordan River.
- Take twelve stones to be a sign amongst the children of Israel.
- Joshua sets up twelve stones in the Jordan, where the priests stood.
- Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh pass over armed for battle.
- God exalts Joshua and all Israel stand in awe of him as they had Moses.
- Priests come up from the Jordan, and the waters return to their place.
- The people came out of Jordan and set up the twelve stones at Gilgal.

FOR INFORMATION: concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

INTRODUCTION: the first five books of Moses anticipated the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham concerning the Promised Land. Moses is now dead. Joshua crosses the River Jordan (about 1400 B.C.) and after a string of military victories apportioned the land according to the twelve tribes. These battles shine a brilliant spotlight upon the truth that God fights for His people when they are faithful and courageous and put their full trust in Him. (Josh. 1:6-9). At the close of the book Joshua says that he and all his house will serve the LORD and invites the people to choose whether they will serve the gods of their fathers or the gods in whose land they dwell or the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob. The people choose to serve their God. (Josh. 24:15). Although anonymous the book appears to contain eyewitness testimony, some of which may have been written by Joshua himself.

JOSHUA 4:1-5

Twelve Men take a Stone each from the Middle of the Jordan River.

- **Joshua 4:1-5:** When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, ²"Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, ³and command them, saying, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight.'" ⁴Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. ⁵And Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel.

In the previous chapter we are told that immediately the priests carrying the ark stood in the water the river not only stopped flowing it backed up all the way back to a city named Adam so that the waters were kept at a distance from the Israelites while they crossed into the land of Canaan. We are told that Israel crossed the river opposite the city of Jericho, (the first city Joshua conquered), but the exact spot is unknown. This miracle is made an even greater wonder when it is considered that God stopped the waters of the River Jordan from flowing at a time when the banks of the river overflowed. (Joshua 3:14-17).

Midst: comes from the Hebrew word (*tavek*) and means within the centre or middle. It appears that the priests entered the water, the waters backed up to Adam and the priests walked to the middle of the river and stood there while all the people crossed the river on dry ground. Once all the people had crossed the river the twelve men (one from each tribe) gather a stone each from where the priests had stood in the middle of the river. The twelve men carried the stones on their shoulder to the place they stayed that night and ten days later set them up as an altar at Gilgal (v20).

JOSHUA 4:6-7

Take Twelve Stones to be a Sign amongst the Children of Israel.

- **Joshua 4:6-7:** that this (the twelve stones) may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' ⁷then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So, these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever."

The purpose of the twelve memorial stones was that they would forever arouse the curiosity of the future children of Israel and when they asked their parents what are these twelve stones, they would tell them the story of their fathers crossing the River Jordan.

JOSHUA 4:8-11

Joshua sets up Twelve Stones in the Jordan, where Priests Stood.

- **Joshua 4:8-11:** And the people of Israel did just as Joshua commanded and took up twelve stones out of the midst of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, just as the LORD told Joshua. And they carried them over with them to the place where they lodged and laid them down there. ⁹And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day. ¹⁰For the priests bearing the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua. The people passed over in haste. ¹¹And when all the people had finished passing over, the ark of the LORD and the priests passed over before the people.

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There was two be memorials set up, one in the River Jordan where the priest stood with the Ark and one at Gilgal (v20). The one in the river would mark the spot where the people crossed, while the one at Gilgal was by the command of God to be set up to be a sign for Israel's future generations. When all the people had crossed over the river Joshua with the help of the men would have spent some time gathering the stones to establish the memorial in the river-bed. It is most likely that this memorial was built with stones much larger than the ones carried on a man's shoulder and that this memorial was built in such a solid manner that it withstood the flow of the river and high enough to be visible when the water were flowing at their normal shallow depth. Since the waters of the Jordan river are said to be very pure and clear it is also possible this memorial was seen when it was covered by water at least by those who stood upon the shore and by those that passed by it in boats.

Unto this day: meaning unto the time when this history was written.

The people passed over in haste: (v10) perhaps from the thought the river may only stay back for a certain period of time since it would have taken some hours for all the people to cross. This is most likely one of the reasons God had the priests with the Ark remain steadfast in the midst of the river. Seeing the priests and the Ark would have given the people a visible sign that God was with them.

Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh pass over for Battle.

- **Joshua 4:12-13:** The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh passed over armed before the people of Israel, as Moses had told them. ¹³About 40,000 ready for war passed over before the LORD for battle, to the plains of Jericho.

These tribes had already received their inheritance on the east bank of Jordan River. The men of valour promised Moses that they would cross the river and go with the remaining tribes into the land of Canaan to battle with them until all tribes had been allotted their inheritance of land. Here we see that they loyally kept their promise and marched with their brethren prepared for battle and ready to protect the people.

JOSHUA 4:14

God exalts Joshua and Israel stand in Awe of Him.

- **Joshua 4:14:** On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they stood in awe of him just as they had stood in awe of Moses, all the days of his life.

In the same way that God parted the Red Sea for Moses to lead the people of Israel through God parted the River Jordan for Joshua to lead the people through and in this way exalted Joshua in the same manner and the people stood in awe of him.

JOSHUA 4:15-18

Priests come up from Jordan, and Waters Return to their Place.

- **Joshua 4:15-18:** And the LORD said to Joshua, ¹⁶"Command the priests bearing the ark of the testimony to come up out of the Jordan." ¹⁷So Joshua commanded the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan." ¹⁸And when the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD came up from the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up on dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks, as before.

There are some Christians who attempt to explain some of the miracles recorded in the Bible in a way that they fit according to our laws of nature as we understand them to be, but this is foolishness since it is the miracles of the Bible that separates the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob from any other god people believe in. Besides this all Christians believe that God created all things so for Him to do anything else outside of the laws of nature is but a simple task indeed.

Added to this God dwells outside of our laws of nature and He is the one who established them so to do anything at all that defies our laws of nature, though a miracle to us, is normal for God. One of these great miracles is of course the waters of the River Jordan, flowing downstream suddenly coming to a halt and forming a wall of solid water while Israel over some hours passes through it on dry ground. Figuratively this could be seen as the entire new nation of Israel being water baptised before they enter the Promise Land.

JOSHUA 4:19-24

The people came out of Jordan and Set up Twelve stones at Gilgal.

- **Joshua 4:19-24:** The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. ²⁰And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. ²¹And he said to the people of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?' ²²then you shall let your children know, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' ²³For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, ²⁴so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever."

The twelve stones that the twelve men carried up out of the Jordan River were set up at Gilgal not only to be a sign and memorial to Israel's future Generations so that they would fear the LORD, but also, so that all the people of the earth would know that their God is mighty.

The fear of the LORD: the reason a person is told to fear the LORD is because all humans have sinned and will one-day be judged by God. This fear should motivate all of us to seek God and his eternal salvation and forgiveness. This is why the Bible says the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom it motivates a person to seek God and His forgiveness. The apostle John in his letter wrote:

- If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10).

The fear of the LORD has the following two aspects:

- 1 An eternal aspect: wisdom teaches that mankind is separated from God because of sin and without God a person has no hope of eternal life and will be judged accordingly. The fear of the LORD in this context is wisdom because it motivates a person to seek God and eternal life.
- 2 An aspect for the present moment: the fear of the LORD in the present moment motivates mankind to obey God's Ten Commandments which are all designed to protect the innocent from harm, physically, financially, sexually, verbally, emotionally and spiritually (summed up they mean do-good and not harm). The fear of the LORD in this context is also wisdom because if everyone feared the LORD humanity would live in harmony with each other. Sadly, there is very little fear of the LORD in the world today and so we see rampant rebellion, violence, crime and wars in most countries.

The fear of God and Christians: those in Christ look to the bloodstained cross of Calvary and understand and experience Christ's great love and God's grace in their hearts and minds and no longer act from fear, but from love in the same way that a man in love with a woman does not do things to please her from fear, but from the love dwelling in his heart. Likewise, it is with the faithful who belong to the Lords global family.

- The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate. (Prov. 8:13).

The fear of the LORD is hatred toward evil: it is having a hatred of everything that harms another human physically, financially, sexually, emotionally, or spiritually and having a strong dislike of anything that destroys the planet and of whoever treats animals cruelly. God loves humans He gave his only Son to die for them. The fear of the LORD is about protecting and preventing harm to other humans. It is about knowing we are all going to stand before Him one day and give an account of our actions. The fear of this judgment should motivate a person to do the right thing and treat others with respect.

NOTE: as the people crossed the river Jordan it was no-doubt easier to believe that the waters would not rush down on them when they could look at the priests standing in the middle of the river bed with the Ark of the Covenant, the visible symbol of God's presence on their shoulders. God

made His very present help of the same length as was needed for even the feeblest of His people to cross safely through the River Jordan and enter the Promised Land. Likewise, God's grace in Christ will keep the faithful as they travel through this fallen and corrupted world of sin until that glorious day when he returns in glory as King of kings and Lord of lords to gather the faithful to himself.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

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