



Remembering God's Works

GOD INSTRUCTED THE PEOPLE TO SET UP A MEMORIAL
AS A REMINDER OF HIS POWER.

Scripture Passage: Joshua 3:14–4:9 Memory Verse: Psalm 77:11-12

Memorials are important. We erect buildings and monuments to pay tribute to great people and events that have shaped our history. Memorials allow us to honor the past, share collective memories, and express grief. Monuments may be elaborate, permanent structures like the Lincoln Memorial or simple roadside memorials for a loved one who died in an automobile accident. Such visual reminders stimulate our memories of the past and challenge us to live better lives in the present.

As you prepare to lead this session, reflect on significant spiritual milestones in your life. Maybe it involved an answered prayer or a mountaintop experience with God at a camp or retreat. It could be a crisis situation that left you with the assurance of God's presence. What memorials of that experience sustain you during spiritually dry times? Thank God for those times in your life and pray for His leadership as you think about ways you can lead the adults in your group to remember how God has worked in their lives and to testify to the Lord's power moving forward.



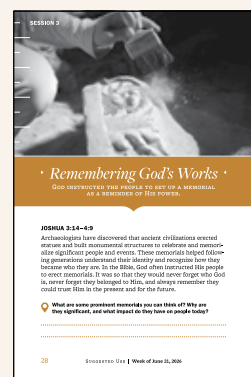
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Archaeologists have discovered that ancient civilizations erected statues and built monumental structures to celebrate and memorialize significant people and events. These memorials helped following generations understand their identity and recognize how they became who they are. In the Bible, God often instructed His people to erect memorials. It was so that they would never forget who God is, never forget they belonged to Him, and always remember they could trust Him in the present and for the future. (PSG, p. 28)

What are some prominent memorials you can think of? Why are they significant, and what impact do they have on people today?



Understand the Context (Joshua 3:1-5:15)

Joshua, the son of Nun, succeeded Moses as Israel's leader after the nation spent decades wandering in the wilderness. Joshua 3 records the crossing of the Jordan River, as the Israelites took their next steps toward the promised land.

Joshua instructed the people to consecrate themselves in preparation for the crossing. Taking the lead, the priests carried the ark of the covenant, the sacred box that represented God's presence among the Israelites. The Jordan was at flood stage; but, when the priests' feet touched the water, the river's downstream flow was cut off. The entire nation crossed the Jordan on dry ground. This miraculous crossing glorified God and affirmed Joshua as His chosen leader. The Lord established Joshua at the Jordan just as He had established Moses at the Red Sea.

On the west side of the Jordan, the Israelites followed God's directions and build a monument of twelve stones carried out of the river. Each stone represented a tribe of Israel, and the memorial itself served as a reminder of God's power and provision. When the Israelites' children asked about the stones, the older generation could tell them about what God had done for His people that day.

News of Israel's miraculous crossing struck fear in the hearts of the resident Canaanites (Josh. 5:1). By this, the Lord was preparing Israel for victory over the land's inhabitants. However, the people also needed to get ready on

a spiritual level. The people renewed their covenant with God by making sure every male was circumcised. Centuries earlier, God had established circumcision as a sign of His covenant with Abraham (5:2-3; see Gen. 17:1-14). Apparently, the Israelites had failed to practice circumcision in the wilderness, but the practice was restored at Gilgal. The location's name represents a word-play on a verb meaning "to roll away." At Gilgal, the Lord "rolled away the disgrace of Egypt" (Josh. 5:9).

Following their covenant renewal, the Israelites observed Passover, which commemorated the tenth plague God sent against Egypt. On that occasion, the firstborn of Egypt died as the death angel passed over. Meanwhile, the Israelites were spared because the people had sprinkled the lamb's blood on their doorposts. After observing the Passover, they ate from the land's produce for the first time and the manna ceased (5:11-12).

Chapter 5 concludes with Joshua's encounter with the commander of the Lord's army. As Joshua prepared to lead Israel's army in the conquest of Canaan, this experience reminded him that he always needed to look to the Lord as his Commander.

Compare the crossing of the Jordan in Joshua 3:14-17 to the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus 14:15-31. What are the similarities? (PSG, p. 29)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Prior to the session, place a colored circle by Gilgal on **Pack Item 1** (*Map: The Conquest of Canaan*). Make copies of **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: The Life of Joshua*) and **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Memorial Stones*).

ASK:

What are some prominent memorials you can think of? Why are they significant, and what impact do they have on people today? (PSG, p. 28)

READ:

Direct a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 28 of the PSG. Affirm that the purpose of monuments is to remind us of what has happened in our past and to challenge us to look ahead to the future. Explain that today's session focuses on how Israel memorialized God's mighty works on their behalf as they finally set foot in the promised land.

CONTEXT:

Summarize the miracle God provided for the people as they crossed the Jordan River (PSG, p. 29):

“At that time of year, the Jordan’s banks were overflowing. Nevertheless, when the priests stepped into the water, the waters receded, making a dry path for all of Israel to cross (3:6-17; 4:23). When every Israelite had completed crossing the Jordan, the Lord commanded Joshua to choose twelve men, one from each tribe, to each take a stone from the riverbed.”

LOCATE:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 1** (*Map: The Conquest of Canaan*). Highlight Gilgal on the map and share that this is where the men took the stones from the river. Point out that God commanded Joshua to use those stones to build a memorial at Gilgal.

TRANSITION:

We will dig deeper into these events in this session.



Group Activity Option

Music

Distribute hymnals. Lead adults to call out hymns or other songs that have a significant meaning to them. As songs are shared, ask: **Why is this song so special to you? When you hear or sing this song, what memories of God's work in your life are stirred?** Affirm the power of music to remind us of important moments in our lives. Explain that this session examines how God challenged the Israelites to remember His faithfulness and His ongoing activity in our lives.

Dry Ground (Josh. 3:14-17)

14 When the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carried the ark of the covenant ahead of the people. **15** Now the Jordan overflows its banks throughout the harvest season. But as soon as the priests carrying the ark reached the Jordan, their feet touched the water at its edge **16** and the water flowing downstream stood still, rising up in a mass that extended as far as Adam, a city next to Zarethan. The water flowing downstream into the Sea of the Arabah—the Dead Sea—was completely cut off, and the people crossed opposite Jericho. **17** The priests carrying the ark of the LORD’s covenant stood firmly on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel crossed on dry ground until the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan.

(v. 14) As Israel *broke camp to cross the Jordan*, Joshua instructed the people to consecrate themselves. The officers also commanded them to follow the priests when they saw the *ark of the covenant* being moved (3:3-6). Meanwhile, God told Joshua personally that He would exalt him in the eyes of the people (3:7). The Israelites would know the Lord was with Joshua just as He had been with Moses.

Similarities exist between the previous generation’s crossing of the Red Sea and this generation’s crossing of *the Jordan*. In both events the Lord miraculously separated waters and allowed His people to cross on dry ground. In both instances the waters “heaped up” (Ex. 15:8; “rising up in a mass,” Josh. 3:16), as God’s people overcame a tremendous obstacle. And the primary purpose of each crossing was to bring glory to God and to affirm the man God had chosen to lead Israel (Ex. 14:31; Josh. 3:7-13).

The Hebrew phrase translated *broke camp* more literally means “pulled up tents.” After the people consecrated themselves (3:5), the priests bearing the *ark of the covenant* led the Israelites’ march across the river. The ark reminded the Israelites of God’s presence with them. This gold-covered box contained the Ten Commandments, a jar of manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded. Each item emphasized God’s work among His people through His provision of the law, His provision of nourishment, and His provision of leadership.

(v. 15) The comment that *the Jordan overflows its banks throughout the harvest season* enhances the miracle that follows. The statement adds a measure of tension by implying that the upcoming event would defy the laws of nature.

According to Jewish calendars, the crossing took place in the month of Abib or Nisan, which roughly corresponds to March and April on our

calendar. The Lord had established Nisan as the first month of the Israelites’ spiritual year when He established Passover (Ex. 12:1-2). This was also *harvest season*, a time when the Jordan River normally exceeded its flood stage.

(v. 16) As soon as the priests carrying the ark of the covenant stepped into the Jordan, *the water flowing downstream stood still*. These waters rose *in a mass that extended as far as Adam*, a city located at least fifteen miles north of the Israelites’ crossing point. With the waters from upstream stymied, the water flowing downstream quickly emptied into the Dead Sea.

(v. 17) The wall of water upstream left nothing but *dry ground* for God’s people. The priests with the ark stood on *dry ground in the middle of the Jordan* where water had flowed moments earlier. In addition, *all Israel* could cross into the promised land on dry ground.

The crossing occurred on the tenth day of the first month (Josh. 4:19). The fact that the entire nation crossed on dry ground when the river was at flood stage stresses the miraculous nature of the event. We can be sure that God never fails to provide perfectly for His people during their time of need.



Acts of God

Learn more about how the Israelites experienced the powerful acts of God in the books of Joshua and Judges.

EXPLORE Joshua 3:14-17



APPLICATION POINT: We can be sure that God never fails to provide perfectly for His people during their time of need.

REVIEW:

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: The Life of Joshua*). Review Joshua’s role in Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Note that God called him to lead Israel in Joshua 1 and now we pick up on his first steps in leading the people across the Jordan River and into the promised land.

ASK:

Why are barriers an important part of our spiritual journey? (PSG, p. 32) Discuss how the Jordan River presented a barrier to Israel reaching the promised land.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Joshua 3:14-17 as the group listens for the specific details to set up the crossing.

RECAP:

Stress the significance of the timing of this river crossing:

This event happened in the spring when the Jordan River was in its flood stage. Typically, the Jordan was not difficult to cross. Throughout most of the year, the Jordan was anywhere from three to ten feet deep and ninety to a hundred feet wide. However, its being at flood stage means that the water was overflowing its banks, which also means that the depth and width of the river were significantly deeper and wider than normal. . . . With these conditions, the river appeared to be impossible to cross. These circumstances highlight just how amazing this miracle was. (PSG, p. 31)

REFLECT:

On the board, write: *Nothing is impossible with God.* Discuss the meaning of the phrase and its significance in these verses. Use information from Joshua 3:14 in the Leader Guide to compare this miracle to the Red Sea.



Group Activity Option

Compare and Contrast

Lead adults to compare and contrast the Jordan River here and the Red Sea in Exodus 14:15-31. Emphasize how God displayed His power in each miraculous crossing. Highlight that each miracle affirmed God’s power, authority, and glory—as well as validated the leader He had chosen for His people.

Memorial Stones (Josh. 4:1-7)

1 After the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD spoke to Joshua: **2** “Choose twelve men from the people, one man for each tribe, **3** and command them: Take twelve stones from this place in the middle of the Jordan where the priests are standing, carry them with you, and set them down at the place where you spend the night.” **4** So Joshua summoned the twelve men he had selected from the Israelites, one man for each tribe, **5** and said to them, “Go across to the ark of the LORD your God in the middle of the Jordan. Each of you lift a stone onto his shoulder, one for each of the Israelite tribes, **6** so that this will be a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ **7** you should tell them, ‘The water of the Jordan was cut off in front of the ark of the LORD’s covenant. When it crossed the Jordan, the Jordan’s water was cut off.’ Therefore these stones will always be a memorial for the Israelites.”

(v. 1) Joshua 4 begins with a repetition of the last part of 3:17, providing a backward look at the miracle of *crossing the Jordan*. Verse 1 also gives a look ahead by introducing the authoritative Speaker of the instructions in verses 2-3. Emphasis falls on the fact that Joshua acted in obedience to *the LORD*. Recall that God had previously stressed that obeying His commands would be the key to Joshua’s success (see Josh. 1:7-8).

(vv. 2-3) The Lord commanded Joshua to choose *twelve men*, one representing *each tribe* of Israelites. The account does not follow a strict chronological order at this point. It is not clear if the twelve men completely crossed the river first (as suggested in v. 1) or if they picked up the stones as they crossed (as suggested by *carry them with you* in v. 3). Regardless, the writer’s emphasis was on the miracle God provided and the people’s obedience to His commands.

The writer also highlighted the purpose of the stones on the other side of the river. Stones taken from *where the priests are standing* in the middle of the riverbed provided additional evidence that the river’s water had indeed stopped in its place, allowing Israel to cross. The Lord commanded that His people take the twelve stones and *set them down at the place where you spend the night*. The Hebrew verb rendered *set them down* relates to the word “rest.” The concept of Israel’s “rest” after years of wandering in the wilderness is a key theme in Joshua.

(v. 4) The mention of *twelve men*—as God directed, *one man for each tribe*—refers back to Joshua 3:12 and 4:2. The Hebrew verb translated *selected* in verse 4 basically means “established.” It comes from the same root as the word

rendered “firmly” in 3:17. Just as the priests had stood firm in the dry riverbed, Joshua established the men he chose with a great responsibility.

(vv. 5-7) Joshua instructed the men to go to the *ark of the LORD your God* in the middle of the river and to take a stone from that spot. The twelve found the stones close to where the priests were standing with the ark. Joshua’s reference to the twelve stones as corresponding to the number of *Israelite tribes* echoes God’s words and calls attention to Israel’s unity. They were one nation, not twelve independent tribes. The Lord’s presence with His people, symbolized by the ark, is a repeated theme in chapters 3–4.

The stones served as a *sign* for the current generation and their descendants. The Hebrew term for *sign* can signify an unusual event. These particular stones would direct people back to God’s miraculous work in that spot. The Lord intended these stones to elicit questions about spiritual matters (see Deut. 6:4-9,20-25).

The stones were a *memorial*. The Hebrew term is derived from “to remember.” They functioned as a visual reminder of the dramatic way the Lord had helped His people. By reminding Israel of God’s work, the stones pointed future generations toward a deeper faith in Him.

Key Doctrine

God

To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. (See Exodus 20:1-3; 1 Timothy 1:17.)

EXPLORE Joshua 4:1-7



APPLICATION POINT: We should establish memorials in our lives that consistently remind us of God's work on our behalf.

DISCUSS:

Encourage adults to share if they have run a marathon or half marathon. Lead a brief discussion on the significance of mile markers and way points, especially to help people keep going.

READ:

Call for a volunteer to read aloud Joshua 4:1-7, directing the group to listen for the marker God established.

EXAMINE:

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Memorial Stones*). Allow adults times to scan the article. Lead a brief discussion on the significance of the markers. Emphasize the purpose of God's commands in these verses:

The stones would be a memorial of what God had done that day, cutting off the waters of the Jordan in front of the Lord's ark and allowing the people to cross the river on dry ground into the promised land. Certainly, this memorial was to serve as a reminder to the people who crossed the Jordan that day, but it also was to be a witness to generations to come. When their children would ask them what the meaning of the stacked stones was, the parents could tell them what God had done. (PSG, p. 34)

ASK:

What are some milestones that could remind people of God's work in their lives? (PSG, p. 34)

SAY:

The establishment of this memorial should be a challenge to all of us to remember what God has done in our lives. Beyond that, we have to be willing to share His work with others, including younger generations.

TRANSITION:

After the people had crossed over the river on dry ground and collected the stones, it was time to build the monument.



Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Joshua and the Israelites erected a memorial of twelve stones to help them remember and testify to what the Lord had done for them in the past. ***What specific memorials help you recall spiritual mountaintops in your experience with the Lord? What do you want to remember from those events? What tangible object can you use to help you remember God's work in your life at that time?***

Lasting Reminders (Josh. 4:8-9)

8 The Israelites did just as Joshua had commanded them. The twelve men took stones from the middle of the Jordan, one for each of the Israelite tribes, just as the LORD had told Joshua. They carried them to the camp and set them down there. **9** Joshua also set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing. The stones are still there today.

(v. 8) This verse affirms the Israelites' obedience to the Lord's command through Joshua. They acted in accord with what **Joshua had commanded** them. The Hebrew verb translated *commanded* appears in the Old Testament with both God and human beings as its subject. It reflects a solidly structured society in which leaders received the right to rule by God's command (see 2 Sam. 7:7).

Under God's authority, a leader then had the power to command the people and to expect their obedience (see Josh. 1:9,16). In essence, obedience to the leader reflected obedience to God. Likewise, disobedience to a leader established by God was tantamount to rebellion against the Lord.

When the Lord commands something to be done, He never fails to equip His people to do it. Also, He never forgets what He has commanded. God carefully fulfills every responsibility related to His instructions (1 Chron. 16:14-18). As God's chosen leader, Joshua acted as a true biblical prophet, although he is never identified in that spiritual office. Still, like other biblical leaders, he served as the Lord's messenger for Israel, sharing His words with His people.

The **twelve men** carried their stones from the **middle of the Jordan** to the place where they camped. As noted, each stone represented one of **the Israelite tribes**. After the number seven, the number *twelve* stands out as the most significant number appearing in Scripture. Twelve tribes constituted the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. In the New Testament Jesus chose twelve disciples to be with Him and learn from Him.

The importance of the number twelve also becomes evident in God's decision to maintain that number. While the priestly tribe of Levi was not numbered among the twelve for land distribution, the tribes descending from Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) were counted separately to maintain the number twelve. And, after Judas Iscariot committed suicide following his betrayal of Jesus,

the other disciples quickly added another qualified Christ follower to replace him and maintain the number twelve (Acts 1:15-26).

Twelve also plays an important role in Revelation. The new Jerusalem included twelve gates and stood on twelve foundations (Rev. 21:12-14). The tree of life produced twelve kinds of fruit (22:2). John used a multiple of twelve to identify 144,000 servants of God. That group included twelve thousand people drawn from each of Israel's twelve tribes (Rev. 7:4-8).

The writer again associated the people's obedience to Joshua with obedience to God. As they did what Joshua commanded, they also were doing things **just as the LORD had told** them through Joshua.

(v. 9) Some scholars believe that a second pile of twelve stones was placed in the Jordan's dry riverbed. If so, they were placed **where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing**. God designed the *ark of the covenant* to be moved easily from place to place. This symbol of God's presence was rectangular, approximately four feet long and two and one-half feet wide. About thirty inches deep, it was carried using poles. Only the Levites could carry it.

Others believe the Hebrew wording in verse 9 simply points to the original memorial established on the west side of the Jordan. Regardless, the inspired writer's emphasis was on the lasting nature of the memorial. Even though the Jordan returned to its normal flow, the monument was **still there** when the story was recorded.

The memorial would serve as a testimony of the awesome God who led His people across a flooded river into the land He had promised them. God still expects believers to remember Him and to testify to what He has done for them.



APPLICATION POINT: God expects believers to remember and testify to what He has done for them.

READ:

Call for the group to read silently Joshua 4:8-9, looking for how many monuments were built and where.

EXPLAIN:

Encourage adults to share physical monuments or markers they may currently have around their home. Allow volunteers to share about their items and why they are significant. Lead the group to review the information about the monument set up in verse 8:

The twelve men set the stones in the camp. . . . Verse 19 indicates the camp was located in Gilgal, a place that would have great significance in the life of Israel going forward. Thus, generations to come would have the opportunity to learn the meaning of the twelve stones. (PSG, p. 35)

DISCUSS:

Read verse 9 aloud again. Lead a brief discussion on why it would be important for the Israelites to know that the monument was still there. Talk about how events in our lives as believers can serve as “memorials” to God’s work in our lives.

ASK:

How can previous experiences with God strengthen a person’s faith? How can we pass on our faith stories to future generations? (PSG, p. 35) Record suggestions about sharing with future generations on the board or a large sheet of paper. Emphasize the importance of recounting our personal faith stories for our children and grandchildren.

PRAY:

Thank God for His activity in the lives of His people, asking Him to help each adult remember how much He does for them.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Stones

Prior to class, gather enough small, smooth stones for each adult to have one. Provide permanent markers. Call for a volunteer to read Psalm 77:11-12, the memory verse for this session. Encourage adults to think of a specific incident in which God worked in their lives and to write a one- or two-word description of the event on one side of their stone as a reminder. Direct them to write “Psalm 77:11-12” on the other side of the stone. Challenge them to put their stone in a location where they will see it often and remember God’s activity on their behalf.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 36 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *We can be sure that God never fails to provide perfectly for His people during their time of need.*
- *We should establish memorials in our lives that consistently remind us of God's work on our behalf.*
- *God expects believers to remember and testify to what He has done for them.*

REVIEW:

Discuss the importance of spiritual memorials in our lives and how we can use them to reflect upon God's work in our lives. Encourage adults to respond to the first question set on page 36 of the PSG. Remind them that the focus should remain on giving God the glory for what He has done. Urge them to share His works with someone else during the week ahead.

DISCUSS:

Guide the group to reflect personally on the second question set on page 36 of the PSG. Challenge them to make a list of "memorials" that reveal God's faithfulness and power in their lives. Suggest they write a brief prayer of gratitude to God for each instance on their list.

PRAY:

Close in prayer, thanking God for His faithful work in the lives of believers and asking Him to remind each individual of His work in their lives and the lives of those around them.

AFTER THE SESSION

Reinforce the session by texting or emailing the group. Share a photo of one of your spiritual markers or memorials. Describe what it is and why it is significant. Encourage adults to share their own photos in the group message. Remind the group of the importance God places on remembering His work and sharing that work with others.

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