

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION TO JOSHUA 4

This chapter relates an order, that is men, should take twelve stones out of the midst of Jordan, and carry them to the first place they lodged at as a memorial of their passage over it, (^(H4)Joshua 4:1-8); and how Joshua set up twelve other stones in the river itself, (^(H4)Joshua 4:9); and how many of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh, went before the Israelites when they passed over, (^(H4)Joshua 4:10-14); which being done, the priests were ordered to come out of Jordan, when the waters returned to their place, (^(H4)Joshua 4:15-18); The time when this miracle was wrought is observed, (^(H4)Joshua 4:19); and an account is given of Joshua's pitching the twelve stones taken out of Jordan in Gilgal, and the use they were to be of in future time, (^(H4)Joshua 4:20-24).

Ver. 1. *And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over Jordan,* etc.] As related, (^(H3)Joshua 3:17);

that the Lord spake unto Joshua, saying: as follows.

Ver. 2. *Take you twelve men out of the people,* etc.] Joshua had before this ordered twelve men to be taken from among them, which seems to have been done of himself; and now he has a direction from God for it, and what to employ them in:

out of every tribe a man; so that what they did was in the name of the several tribes, and as representing them.

Ver. 3. *And command you them, saying,* etc.] As follows:

take you hence out of the midst of Jordan; so that they were obliged to go back into the midst of Jordan, having already passed over it, as appears from (^(H4)Joshua 4:1);

out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm; where being stones, they chose to stand upon them, and which were a firm standing for them; and which secured them from the slime and mud at the bottom of the river the waters left behind; though it is not absolutely necessary to understand it

that they were to take, and did take, the stones from under their feet, but those that lay about the place where they stood:

twelve stones; each man a stone; and, according to the Samaritan Chronicle^{f52}, every man inscribed his name on the stone:

and ye shall carry them over with you; from the place they took them up, to the place they should next stop at:

and leave them in the lodging place where you shall lodge this night: which was in the place afterwards called Gilgal, (^{<RHB>}Joshua 4:19,20).

Ver. 4. *Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had prepared of the children of Israel*, etc.] It may be for some other purpose, (^{<RHB>}Joshua 3:12); but this was the destination of them eventually, and as by divine direction:

out of every tribe a man: as he had before ordered, and was now directed to.

Ver. 5. *And Joshua said unto them*, etc.] The twelve men:

pass ye over before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of Jordan; that is, they were to go back to Jordan again, which they had passed over, and go into the midst of it, where were the priests bearing the ark; for it is not to be imagined that the ark went along with them, or followed them, they going before it; but they went where that was, just before it, from whence they were to take the stones, as next directed:

and take you up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder; by which it appears they were large stones they were to take, not what they could carry in their hands, but what they were obliged to take upon their shoulders:

according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel; who had that day passed over Jordan, of which these stones were to be a memorial.

Ver. 6. *That this may be a sign among you*, etc.] A commemorative one:

[that] when your children ask [their fathers] in time to come; or “tomorrow”^{f53} and so in all time, or any time hereafter:

saying, what mean you by these stones? what is the reason of setting them up, and in this place, and being just of such a number?

Ver. 7. *Then ye shall answer them*, etc.] By informing them of the design and use of 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 below from those that were, above, which stood up on an heap; so that they were divided and separated from each other, and made dry land for a passage of the children of Israel; and this was done before, and in the presence of the ark of the covenant, to show that it was owing to the power of God, of whose presence the ark was a symbol:

the waters of Jordan were cut off; which is repeated for the confirmation of it, and that it might be taken notice of as a very marvellous event, and to be ascribed to the divine omnipotence and goodness:

and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever; which, whenever seen and observed by them, would put them in mind of this wonderful appearance of God for them; and Jerom^{f54} speaks of them as if seen by Paula in his time, whose life and travels in those parts are written by him.

Ver. 8. *And the children of Israel did so as Joshua commanded*, etc.] That is, the twelve men taken out of the twelve tribes of Israel, and who were the representatives of them in this action;

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; they took the exact number, and out of the very place Joshua was ordered to direct them to do:

and carried them over with them unto the place where they lodged: which, as Josephus says^{f55}, was fifty furlongs from Jordan, which was above six miles; so far they carried these stones on their shoulders:

and laid them down there; which afterwards were put in proper order by Joshua, or at least by his direction.

Ver. 9. *And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan*, etc.] Twelve other stones, as the Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions, and so Jarchi; which he set one upon another, so that they might be seen above the water; or however the water of Jordan being clear, they might easily be discerned by those who either passed over the river, or walked by the side

of it, where they were; and perhaps may be the very stones John the Baptist pointed at in (~~40B~~ Matthew 3:9); since it was at Bethabara he was baptizing, supposed to be the very place of the passage of the children of Israel over Jordan, and had its name from thence, (~~40B~~ John 1:28);

in the place where the feet of the priests which bare the ark of the covenant stood; and which was done in commemoration of it: the words will bear to be read “under the station” of the feet of the priests: hence Jarchi fancies these were set, that their feet might not sink in the mud at the bottom of the river; but this, though here recorded, might be done by Joshua immediately after the priests were come out of Jordan, or as they were coming up: hence some think Joshua was the last that came up from it; but Abarbinel observes, that the word signifies “in the room” or “stead of”, (see Gill on “~~40B~~ Exodus 21:24”); so that these stones were placed in the room and stead of the station of the priests, in the midst of the river, and in memory of it:

and they are there unto this day; to the time of the writing of this book, which is no objection to Joshua being the writer of it, though it is by some made one; since it might be wrote by him, as doubtless it was, when such an observation could not be impertinent; and if what has been before observed is true, these stones were in the same place in the times of John the Baptist; and that they were in the order in which they were first set; for that they were in the waters of Jordan, there could scarce be any question of it. This was done to perpetuate the memory of this remarkable event: so Alexander the great set up twelve altars on the borders of India, by the river Oraxes, in commemoration of his exploits ^{f56}.

Ver. 10. *For the priests which bare the ark stood in the midst of Jordan,* etc.] Though on dry ground, the waters being divided:

until everything was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to speak unto the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua; that is, until all the people had passed over Jordan, as the Lord had ordered Joshua, to encourage them unto, and go over with them, (~~40B~~ Joshua 1:2); and which Moses, by divine direction, had given Joshua in charge to do, (~~430B~~ Deuteronomy 31:7); Kimchi interprets this of the setting up of the stones in Jordan, and the removal of the other to Gilgal, of which Moses said nothing to Joshua; and though it may be true of the former, that the priests stood in Jordan till that was done, which is not certain, yet not of the latter; for it is plain, and it is most reasonable to conclude, that the

priests were come up from the midst of Jordan before Israel marched to Gilgal, or even began their march, (see ^{<R018>}Joshua 4:18,20); and much less is this to be understood of the stones at Ebal, as others, and so referred to (^{<R21D>}Deuteronomy 27:2); which was not done until after Ai was taken, (^{<R09B>}Joshua 8:24). And it is not reasonable to imagine that the priests should continue in Jordan to that time; Abarbinel thinks it refers to the words in (^{<R00B>}Joshua 1:3); which had been spoken by the Lord to Joshua, and had been expressed by Moses, (^{<R12H>}Deuteronomy 11:24,25); and which he supposes were now repeated by Joshua, and the priests continued in their station until he had made an end of rehearsing them; the last clause relating to Moses is left out in the Septuagint version:

and the people hasted and passed over; not stood in fear of the waters of the river returning upon them; rather through an eager desire of setting their feet on the land of Canaan, and it may be to relieve the priests from their station as soon as might be.

Ver. 11. *And it came to pass, when the people were clean passed over*, etc.] Every one of them, as in (^{<R087>}Joshua 3:17 4:1);

that the ark of the Lord passed over, and the priests, in the presence of the people; that is, the priests bearing the ark came out of the midst of Jordan in the sight of all the people, who were on the banks of it, on the other side, where they had been stationed during the passage of the people; though this motion of them was not until they received an order for it, of which there is an after mention. The Septuagint version reads, “and the stones before them”; (see ^{<R00B>}Joshua 4:8).

Ver. 12. *And the children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh*, etc.] Who were settled on the other side Jordan, in the countries taken from Sihon and Og:

passed over armed before the children of Israel; the rest of the tribes:

as Moses spake unto them; or ordered them, and as they promised they would, (^{<R027>}Numbers 32:17,20,21,27,29,32).

Ver. 13. *About forty thousand prepared for war*, etc.] Accoutred with proper armour to defend themselves, and their brethren, and annoy their enemies: this is to be understood of such a number of the above mentioned tribes; otherwise the number of all Israel that went over Jordan, even armed or fighting men, besides women and children, were five hundred

thousand or more. Now though the number of men fit for war, of these tribes, were an hundred thirty thousand, who were all, according to the original agreement, under obligation to go with their brethren over Jordan into Canaan's land, and continue with them until it was subdued, and they had rest in it; yet Joshua took no more than about forty thousand of them, who we may suppose were select men, and fit for his purpose; the rest were left to look after their flocks, their families, and their lands: these

passed over before the Lord unto battle; over Jordan, before the ark of the Lord, as that stood in Jordan, bore by the priests there, being ready to engage in battle whenever it was necessary: and they went on with their brethren

to the plains of Jericho; to a place afterwards called Gilgal; (see ^{<1019>}Joshua 4:19). The Septuagint version is, to the city Jericho.

Ver. 14. *On that day the Lord magnified Joshua in the sight of Israel*, etc.] Made him great and honourable in their esteem, by doing what he foretold would be done, dividing the waters of Jordan, drying up the river to make a passage for them through it, as on dry land:

and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life; had a reverend esteem of him, and affection for him, and yielded obedience to him all his days; (see ^{<1243>}Exodus 14:31).

Ver. 15. *And the Lord spake unto Joshua*, etc.] When all the people had passed over jordan:

saying; as follows.

Ver. 16. *Command the priests that bear the ark of the testimony*, etc.] In all places before, in this history, the ark is called the ark of the covenant, here the ark of the testimony, which signifies the same thing, the law; which was both the covenant between God and the people, and a testimony of his will unto them; the Septuagint version has both words:

that they come up out of Jordan; where they stayed until all the people passed over, for the encouragement of them, and until they received this order.

Ver. 17. *Joshua therefore commanded the priests*, etc.] In obedience to the Lord, and sent them an order:

saying; as follows:

come ye up out of Jordan; from the midst of the river to the bank of it, which was properly an ascent.

Ver. 18. *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*, etc.] According to the command of Joshua in the name of the Lord:

[and] the soles of the priests' feet were lift up upon the dry land; and set upon it, on the bank of Jordan, and shores of the land of Canaan:

that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place; those that came from above, and had stood on an heap, gradually came down into the channel, and those below that were cut off returned:

and flowed over all his banks, as [they did] before; and usually did at this time of the year, (see ^{<RB5>}Joshua 3:15); so that there was no decrease or loss of the waters by their failing, and being cut off.

Ver. 19. *And the people came up out of Jordan*, etc.] The channel of it, to the shore:

on the tenth [day] of the first month; the month Nisan or Abib, which from the time of Israel's coming out of Egypt was appointed the first month of the year, (^{<RB2>}Exodus 12:2); on the fifteenth of which month they came out of Egypt, having kept the passover on the fourteenth at even; so that their coming out of Egypt, to their entrance into Canaan, was just forty years, wanting five days. This tenth day was the day in which the passover was taken from the flock, and kept till the fourteenth, on which day the children of Israel kept their first passover in Canaan, in the plains of Jericho, (^{<RB50>}Joshua 5:10);

and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho; it has its name here by anticipation, for it was so named after this for a reason given, (^{<RB9>}Joshua 5:9); It was, according to Josephus ^{f57}, ten furlongs, or a mile and a quarter, from Jericho. Jerom says ^{f58}, there was shown in his time a desert place two miles from Jericho, had in wonderful esteem by men of that country, which he suggests was this place; as it was had in great veneration, both by the worshippers of the true God, and by idolaters, for many ages.

Ver. 20. *And those twelve stones which they took out of Jordan,* etc.] The twelve men who were sent there for that purpose, and took them from thence, and brought them hither, (^{<604B>}Joshua 4:3,5,8);

did Joshua pitch in Gilgal; set them in rows, or one upon another, and made a pillar of them commemorative of their passage over Jordan into the land of Canaan: according to Josephus ^{f59}, he made an altar of these stones; and Ben Gersom is of opinion, that they were placed in the sanctuary by the ark, though not in it; which yet was the sentiment of Tertullian ^{f60}, but very improbable; since that ark was not capable of such a number of large stones; and it must be a very large ark or chest, if one could be supposed to be made on purpose for them; but it is most likely they were erected in form of a pillar or statue, in memory of this wonderful event, the passage of Israel over Jordan, (see ^{<604C>}Joshua 4:7); they may be considered as emblems of the twelve apostles of Christ, and their ministrations and writings; their number agrees, and so does the time of their appointment to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel, which was after the resurrection of Christ, typified by the passage of Joshua over Jordan, and out of it; the name of one of them, and he a principal one, was Peter or Cephas, which signifies a stone; and all of them in a spiritual sense were lively stones, chosen and selected from others, and called by grace, and were very probably most, if not all of them, baptized in this very place, Bethabara, from whence these stones were taken; and were like them unpolished, as to external qualifications, not having an education, and being illiterate, but wonderfully fitted by Christ for his service; and were not only pillars, as James, Cephas, and John, but in some sense foundation stones; as they were the instruments of laying Christ ministerially, as the foundation of salvation, and of preaching the fundamental truths of the Gospel, in which they were constant and immovable; and their ministry and writings, their Gospels and epistles, are so many memorials of what Christ, our antitypical Joshua, has done for us in passing over Jordan's river, or through death; finishing thereby transgression and sin, obtaining peace, pardon, righteousness, and salvation, opening the way to the heavenly Canaan, abolishing death, and bringing life and immortality to light.

Ver. 21. *And he spoke unto the children of Israel, saying,* etc.] At the same time he set up the stones:

when you children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What [mean] these stones? (see Gill on "^{<604D>}Joshua 4:6").

Ver. 22. *Then ye shall let your children know*, etc.] The meaning of the erection of these stones, acquaint them with the whole history, the meaning of which they are designed to perpetuate:

saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land; and if they should ask how that could possibly be done, or if they did not, they were to inform them by what means it was brought about, as follows.

Ver. 23. *For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over*, etc.] As this is supposed to be said in future time, and to persons who were not upon the spot when this was done, and so entirely ignorant of the affair; it is not to be understood of them personally, but of the same people they were of, the people of Israel in former times, of their ancestors, and of them in them; the benefits of which they enjoyed by possessing the land of Canaan their fathers were at this time introduced into:

as the Lord your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over; for though the generation of men, for the most part, was dead, that passed through the Red sea; yet as Joshua himself, and Caleb and Eleazar, and it may be some others that were not among the murmurers, were still living, for whom that miracle was wrought, this way of speaking is very properly made use of; and especially when it is observed, that there were many of the present generation then young, which passed over, and even those unborn were in and represented by their ancestors, and who enjoyed the advantages of that wonderful mercy; so these two strange events are joined together, as instances of divine power and goodness, in (^{394B} Psalm 114:3,5).

Ver. 24. *That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it [is] mighty*, etc.] Even almighty, and can do that which is marvellous and surprising, and above the power of nature to effect; things unsearchable and past finding out, which cannot be expressed, or conceived how and by what means they are brought about; this the very Heathens would own and acknowledge when they should see these stones, and be told the meaning of them, or should hear of this amazing event:

that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever; as the above mentioned end was to be answered among the people of the earth by these stones, this among the people of Israel; who upon sight of them would call to mind the power and goodness of God, which would serve to keep an awe of his

majesty on their mind, a due reverence of him and his greatness, and engage them to fear, serve, and worship him; who by such acts as these had abundantly showed himself to be the only true and living God, and the covenant God of them his people Israel; the Septuagint version is,

“that ye may worship the Lord your God in every work.”