

What Do These Stones Mean?

For notes and audio, visit the-lamp-lighter.com

Joshua 3 & 4

A young child standing at the edge of the Jordan River, a generation after the crossing of Joshua. He's never seen a wall of water stand up. He wasn't there. All he sees is a pile of twelve ordinary stones stacked by the riverbank — the kind of rocks you'd walk past without a second look. And he asks his father the question this whole lesson turns on: *"What do these stones mean?"*

God built that question into the stones on purpose. He told Joshua: Set them up so that when your children ask, you'll have something to tell them.

Now, God fills His Word with pictures like this, from the first page to the last. The Red Sea standing open. The Passover lamb and the blood on the doorpost. The bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper. These are some of the most compelling images in all of Scripture, and God gave every one of them on purpose.

But there's a danger built into every picture God gives, and it's a danger we are all prone to. The danger is to turn the picture into a ritual. To start thinking the power is in the doing. "I crossed the water, so I'm fine." "I keep the ritual, so I'm safe." "I missed it, so I'm cursed." And the moment we think that way, we've done something backward: we've started trusting the picture instead of the God the picture points to.

The stones exist so that a child will ask, and a father will answer — and the answer is never "these rocks have power." The answer is always a Person: this is what the LORD did, this is the God who brought us through. The meaning of the picture is never the picture. The meaning is always the One who gave it.

So as we walk through this crossing today, keep that child's question in front of you — because it's not just his question. It's the question these stones are still asking every one of us: What do they mean? And do you know the God they point to?

I. Who goes first? (Joshua 3:1-6)

- A. **The Ark** — God goes first, not in jeopardy of His life, but in condescension for His people. Every other king stays behind the protection of his army. God leads forth in victory. Just as Christ, in humility, was victorious at the cross.
- B. **The Presence** — the ark, to the Israelite, represented the King's throne and His very presence. The distance was not created by a lack of relationship, but by the reverence of His Person (holiness).
- C. **The Unknown** — *"For you have not passed this way before."* (Joshua 3:4) Faith is not knowing the way; it is knowing the One who leads the way. **Deuteronomy 31:8**, *It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."*

II. Why Go Now? (Joshua 3:14-17)

- A. Because the water is at flood stage. God picks the impossible moment on purpose (Joshua 3:15). (Psalm 46:1-3, the waters roar & rage, yet He is our refuge.)
- B. Because the Ark (the King) goes first and stands in the gap, providing safe passage (Joshua 3:17)
- C. Because the impossible is meant to be seen. It was harvest time — the moment of greatest visibility (3:15) — staged so all the peoples of the earth would know the hand of the LORD is mighty (4:24)

III. What is Completed? (Joshua 4:23)

- A. **The same God, the same miracle.** *"The LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan...as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea"* (4:23) God does not begin a rescue He will not finish! (Philippians 1:6)
- B. **Redemption reaches its goal.** The Red Sea brought the old generation OUT of bondage. The Jordan brings the new generation INTO the inheritance. Remember the arc of "given" in chpt 1).
- C. **The picture of baptism.** Paul connects the Red Sea crossing with baptism (1 Cor 10:1-2). By that same pattern, the Jordan crossing pictures our union with Christ in His death and resurrection.

The warning between the bookends. The crossing never saved anyone — the union it pictured did; one generation went through the same water and died in the sand of the wilderness, because the sign without the substance is no salvation at all.

1. Paul's point is not to rob the believer of assurance but to strip the *presumer* of false assurance: *"let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall"* (1 Corinthians 10:12)

2. The remedy was never trying harder to hold on — it was trusting the One who went first.

IV. What Do These Stones Mean? (Joshua 4:1-9, 19-24)

- A. **So the children ask** and then understand the purpose of the pile (of rocks). The miracle is not complete until it is told to the next generation. Remembrance is not for nostalgia. It is so the next generation might know God.
- B. **So the nations know** (“*That all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty*” (Joshua 4:24). The public crossing becomes a public memorial.
- C. **So you fear the LORD forever. Remembrance schools** our heart to the One who is to be forever revered and worshipped for His holiness. The end of the crossing is not about the real estate; it is about worship of the One who brought us OUT and IN. Out of bondage and INTO inheritance

The wilderness generation is the warning; the Jordan generation is the comfort. Same God, same water-miracle, same external covenant — the difference was never the crossing. It was whether the heart trusted the One who parts the water. One generation believed God could only bring them *out* and died doubting He'd bring them *in*. The other trusted Him through the flood and entered. And the question the stones ask every generation since is the same: *will you trust the God who goes first, or will you harden your heart today?*

-
1. **Who He is** — *You are the true Joshua (Savior, Rescuer, Deliverer).*
 2. **What He did** — *You went first into death itself and stood in the gap; we were carried through in You — we didn't part the water, we didn't survive our own death.*
 3. **The stones** — *and so we raise our stones today — not to our crossing but to Your faithfulness; that You do not begin a rescue You will not finish. ←*
 4. **Fear Him forever / vertical stop** — *and when our children ask what this means, we'll tell them: the hand of the Lord is mighty. We will fear You forever. To You be the worship. Amen.*

The Red Sea is the picture of baptism Paul uses in the New Testament — Israel baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea (**1 Cor 10:2**). It pictures our union with Christ in His death and resurrection. The inheritance had already been given to Israel, but it was impossible to reach it without crossing water. No one could cross on their own — crossing the Red Sea was a miracle only God could perform.

In the same way, eternal life is impossible for man to reach on his own and is made possible only by God, through Christ. And by that same pattern, when Israel comes to the brink of the Jordan, they are reminded that the inheritance is entered only by the miraculous intervention of God on their behalf — they are carried through, in Him, because He goes first and stands in the gap.

The warnings concerning the “presumption” of faith vs. the “possession” of faith are plentiful in Scripture. These warnings must be placed there for a reason. Notice them:

- **1 Corinthians 10:12**, Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.
- **Hebrews 3:12**, Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.
- **Hebrews 4:11**, Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

The lesson of the wilderness is that you can pass through the water, eat the bread, sit under the presence, and still have a heart never truly trusted. The warnings are not aimed at the possessor of faith but at the presumers.