

# Mount Olive Baptist

Setting Up Stones • Setting Up Stones • Joshua 4:1-24 • 2/16/2020

## MAIN POINT

Reflecting on where we've come from prepares us to follow Jesus wherever He will lead us in the future.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Are there any objects of significance that have been passed down through the generations in your family? What makes that particular thing special?**

**Are you planning on passing it on to anyone else? When? How will you do it?**

**Why is that kind of thing important in a family? Why is it important that we hold onto objects like those?**

We are by nature a forgetful people. One of the things that helps us remember where we've come from is when we have memories associated with special objects. When we see that object, we have a story to tell about why it's special. In Joshua 4, God commanded His people to set up piles of stones in order to help them remember where they had come from. When we regularly reflect on where we've come from we are better prepared to follow Jesus where He will lead us in the future.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read Joshua 4:1-7.

**Why were the Israelites crossing the Jordan River? Where were they coming from? Where were they going?**

**Why is it important to understand where they had come from and where they were going in order to see why God gave them these instructions?**

It had been a long road to the Jordan River. The people had been slaves in Egypt for some 400 years until God miraculously delivered them. Then they had spent 40 more years wandering in

the wilderness due to their lack of faith. But now, at long last, they were crossing the Jordan River into the land God had promised Abraham hundreds of years earlier. God wisely commanded them not just to cross the river, but to set up a monument that would serve as a reminder of that crossing into the future.

**Does it surprise you that God gave the people this means of remembering what He had done? Why or why not?**

**Do you have anything like these stones in your life? A sort of memorial to help you remember what God had done at a specific time?**

**What kinds of things about God's character would this memorial remind the Israelites of?**

**What about you? What do your memorials remind you of regarding God's character?**

As we follow Jesus into the future, there is no doubt He will lead us through difficult times. It's during times like that when we are likely to question whether God is truly good, or powerful, or even faithful. During those times, we can look back to where we've come from and know that God is still the same God who has always led us. If He provided for us once, He will be faithful to do so again. The Israelites were about to embark on a season of war, and during that time, God knew there would be times when they would need to call to memory His power and faithfulness. By establishing this memorial at Gilgal, their base of operations, the people would see time and time again the reminder of who He is.

| Ask a volunteer to read Joshua 4:8-24.

**Besides this generation of Israelites, there were two other groups of people the memorial was meant to communicate to. Who were they?**

**What does this show you about the way faith is to be communicated through families?**

**Do you have any regular means of re-telling your story of God's faithfulness to the next generation? What are they?**

**What does the fact that the memorial was also set up to show all the people of the earth who God is show you about His intent for His people?**

**How would this memorial result in the fear of the Lord (v. 24)? How does your story have the same result?**

The call from Joshua 4 is a call for us to remember. But remembering is something that rarely happens by accident; it's something we must make an effort to do. But when we do, we are better prepared for what God is calling us to do because we have been bolstered by the memory of His faithfulness in the past. We must be active rememberers, not only for our sake, but for the sake of those coming behind us and for the sake of all the nations of the earth.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What is one way you are going to integrate the discipline of remembering into your life this week?**

**How are you going to do that for your family? To help them regularly recall who God is and who they are in Him?**

**What is one part of your story of God's faithfulness that you need to share with those closest to you this week?**

## PRAYER

Thank God as you close your group for His past faithfulness. Pray for anyone who is currently walking through a season of life in which they need to remember this kind of faithfulness.

## COMMENTARY

| Joshua 4:1-24

4:1. The emphasis on the entire nation crossing suggests the importance of the unity pictured here. The term had finished could also be interpreted as "were finishing," meaning the crossing and the events of verses 1-5 overlapped. The key word crossing (Hb 'avar) occurs four times in this section.

4:2. These are the 12 men selected at 3:12.

4:3. The 12 stones represent the point of the crossing of the whole nation of Israel, all 12 tribes. This would enable future generations to understand and participate spiritually in the crossing that Joshua and the 12 tribes experienced.

4:6-7. The word sign occurs only here in Joshua. In the Pentateuch it is associated with Israel's religious festivals and events, such as Passover (Ex 12:14; 13:9). The explanation given to future

generations takes a chiasmic form. The outermost phrases designate a sign or memorial. Within that are lines referring to these stones and then how the waters of the Jordan were cut off. The central focus is that this occurred when the ark of the Lord's covenant, the presence of God, crossed the Jordan.

4:8-12. There are three possibilities here. First, Joshua may have set up a separate pile of stones in the middle of the river, which was probably visible during the dry season. Second, Joshua, as leader, was credited with taking the 12 stones out of the river by means of the 12 men in his employ. The phrase in verse 9 means that Joshua commanded the men to set up 12 stones from the middle of the Jordan. Third, verse 9 might be retrospective—Joshua had set up 12 stones in the middle of the Jordan—and the 12 men subsequently picked up those same stones and set them down in the camp.

4:13. The troops that crossed entered enemy territory, but they also had established a foothold in the promised land when they arrived west of the Jordan River. This 40,000 represented the best portion of the Transjordanian fighting force that crossed with their kinsmen. According to Num 26:7,18,34 the total of these two and a half tribes would have been over a hundred thousand (see note at Num 1:44-46). Perhaps the rest were protecting their land and families.

4:14. That the Lord exalted Joshua indicates the fulfillment of 3:8. The connection with Moses is reaffirmed.

4:15-17. The time of the exit from the Jordan River, like the time of the entrance into the river, is determined by God.

4:18. The priests' ascent from the river bed brings the miracle to an end. They reversed the procedure by which they began the parting of the waters (3:13-16).

4:19. The tenth day of the first month was the day that preparations for the Passover were to be made (Ex 12:2-3). This signals the celebration of chapter 5. Gilgal, meaning "circle," could describe any of a variety of sites.

4:20-23. The purpose of the 12 stones is found in the questions that the children would ask. The question and the instruction of the next generation about the divine miracles resembles Dt 6:6-9. Questions asked by sons about the significance of the Passover and the exodus are found in the Jewish Passover Seder or liturgy. Their mention here connects this Passover with the events of the crossing of the Jordan just as the earlier Passover remembered the crossing of the Red Sea.

4:24. The purpose of this miracle is to declare God's might to all the people of the earth and to encourage Israel to always fear the Lord. Faith and commitment to God is the goal, just as with

the miracles of Jesus (Jn 20:30-31).