

Joshua 3:17-4:13, Crossing and Preparing the Memorials

October 18, 1997

Overview

Overall chiasmic structure:

Staging on the river bank	3:1-6	4:19-24
Divine Commands re. Stopping the river	3:7-16	4:14-18
Emphasis on Joshua's reputation	3:7	4:14
Exceptional height of the water	3:15	4:18
Summaries of the crossing	3:17	4:10-13
Divine Command re. Memorial	4:1-9	

The focal point of the entire chapter is thus the Lord's instructions to build a memorial to the crossing, setting this event apart as a pivotal one in Israel's life and experience.

Summaries of the Crossing, 3:17; 4:10-13

Both begin with a reference to the priests' position "standing in the midst of the Jordan."

Both say that the priests stood there "until" something was "completed." The Hebrew idiom is parallel in the two cases, though obscured in English.

The action that must be completed is amplified from 3:17 to 4:10-13. The point of amplification is that RGM/2 participated in the crossing. This is explicitly stated, and in addition is emphasized with two details in these panels and a third in the panel that they surround.

1. Israel is called a *goy* "nation" in 3:17 (and in the associated linked keyword in 4:1a), but (*am* "people" in 4:10-11. (AV has "people" in both, obscuring the distinction. *Goy* looks outward to other nations: Israel vs. the Canaanites. (*am* looks inward to Israel's internal relations and her relation with God, and focuses here on the relation of RGM/2 with the rest of the nation. Israel was unified in crossing the Red Sea out of bondage; she must be unified in crossing Jordan into her inheritance.
2. 4:10b refers not only to the command of Joshua, but also to that of Moses. Recalls the pledge in 1:12-15, and Num. 32 before that.
3. Five times in the instructions concerning the memorial in 4:1-9, we read the number "twelve," and twice are told that this is "the number of the tribes of Israel." This number is only appropriate if RGM/2 fully participate in the crossing.

These emphases on Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh are preparing for a final important lesson in 22:9-34. The phrase used here, "the children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and half the tribe [or, the children of] Manasseh," appears in Joshua only here and eight times in ch. 22, where once again we see a monument being built by the Jordan, and where the issue is the unity of the people. To prepare for that discussion, we must understand that the entire people, including RGM/2, shared the experience of crossing over Jordan. While they may live in different places, separated by a mighty river, they are one people before God, one nation before the heathen, and are expected to bear witness to that unity.

Application: One of the most difficult issues with which we must deal is division among those who bear the name of Christ. We may have many differences, but the crucial question is whether we share the foundation experience of the Christian life, redemption through the blood of the Lord Jesus and baptism by the Spirit into his body, the church. When we are embroiled in discussions of the details, attention to the common salvation that we share may help guard us against rash or hasty conflict.

Second Divine Instruction: Collect Stones for a Memorial, 4:1-9

This is the second of the three main paragraphs, each with a command from the Lord to Joshua, passed on by Joshua to the people, and then executed.

This instance falls in the center of the chiasm, emphasizing its importance, which is also seen from the exposition of the memorial itself in 4:19-24.

The Lord Commands, 1-3

When? After all the nation had passed over. These folk went back into the riverbed.

Who? Twelve men, explicitly said to come one from each tribe. Joshua already set these apart in 3:12, but this instruction is explicitly said to have been given only after the people have passed over. Perhaps he wanted representatives with whom to deal during the crossing, and now he puts them to this use.

What? Twelve stones, from the place where the priests stood still. Thus they commemorate

- The miracle (access to the riverbed)
- The means (the priests' standing there)
- The purpose (twelve, one for each of the tribes that passed over)

Where? Place them in that evening's encampment. As a result, Gilgal became an early sanctuary for Israel.

Joshua Exhorts, 4-7

He emphasizes the *Why*, one detail that the Lord did not make explicit in 1-3. These stones are to be a means for instructing the children of future generations, so that they do not forget their heritage.

The content of the memorial: not just that Jordan stopped, but that it did so before the Ark of the Lord. The memorial is to remind the people of the Lord's power to provide for his people, and thus to deepen their trust in him.

The People Obey, 8-9

In fact, two memorials are established:

1. The one commanded by the Lord, at the evening's encampment.
2. Another by Joshua, in the midst of the river itself, where it could be seen at times of low water.

Application: Memorials

Other examples of memorials:

Reference	Event	Memorial
Gen. 9:12-17	Promise: no more flood	Rainbow
Gen 17:9-14	Abrahamic Covenant	Circumcision
Gen 32:24-32	Jacob's struggle with the Angel of the Lord	Jacob's limp Israel's abstention from the thigh sinew
Exod 12:14; 13:9	Israel's redemption & exodus from Egypt	Passover
Ex 13:11-14		Sacrifice/redemption of firstborn
Ex 31:12-17	Creation of the earth; Sinaitic Covenant	Sabbath
Num 16:38	Rebellion of Korah	Brass covering of the altar
Josh 22:26-27	Unity of RGM/2 with other tribes	Alter named "Ed"
Est 9:20-32	Deliverance of Israel from Haman	Feast of Purim
1 Cor 11	Death of the Lord Jesus	Lord's Supper
Rom. 6	Individual's Salvation	Baptism

As a race, we have a very limited memory, and need tangible memorials. Two we celebrate as a church family: the Lord's Supper in memory of his death for us, and baptism to commemorate an individual's salvation. The emphasis throughout the Scriptures on memorials shows how important these ought to be to us. In addition, they encourage us to commemorate other important events within our families, to remember the Lord's goodness to us.

Notice also that these signs are often intended to provoke questions from children (Exod 12:26; 13:14; Deut. 6:20;). We ought not to think that events such as baptisms or the Lord's Supper are times to leave children at home. They do not participate until they are themselves believers, but they ought to see the memorials and parents ought to use the memorials as a means of instructing them.

Third Divine Instruction: The Priests Leave the Jordan, 4:14-18

The final panel of the three divine instructions, again with command from the Lord to Joshua, command from Joshua to the people, and execution.

The Lord Commands, 14-16

As in the first panel, 3:7 (but not the second), we begin with the purpose of the Lord's dealings, to magnify Joshua before the people. The symmetry with the first instruction suggests that the purpose paragraph should be considered part of this panel. Thus, "The Lord magnified Joshua, by saying to him...."

Purpose: to establish Joshua's authority before the people. Compare this purpose paragraph with 3:7. The people learn that God is with Joshua (3:7), and thus they fear him (4:14). These two go together. We must never fear men, except as they represent the Lord's authority. (E.g., Rom. 13:4, be afraid of the magistrate, because he is the minister of God)

Command: the priests to leave the Jordan, just as in v.8 he commanded them to stand in the river.

What is so wonderful about these two commands (“stand still, move”), that they should inspire the people to fear? During the wilderness wanderings, the ark followed the cloud, and the people followed the ark. Now the ark moves at Joshua’s command; God is leading through a man, rather than through his direct revelation in the cloud. Furthermore, he is of Ephraim (Num 13:8, 16), not of Levi as was Moses. For the first time since the Exodus, God’s direction comes through someone who is not of the priestly family.

Joshua passes on the order, 17

Execution: Jordan resumes its flow, 18

Notice the link to 3:15, in the execution section of the first command panel. Both of these emphasize that the usual condition of Jordan at this season is to “flow[] over all his banks.” Unbelievers like to seek for natural explanations of biblical miracles, but God often seeks conditions that make them more difficult, to emphasize his power (cf. Elijah’s water-soaked altar on Mt. Carmel).

Staging in Gilgal, 19-24

Arrival in Gilgal

They arrive in Canaan on the tenth day of the first month. The note prepares us for the Passover in 5:10; this is the day they must set apart their lambs, per Exod. 12:3. It is also just a month and ten days after Moses delivered Deuteronomy (Dt 1:3).

Joshua exhorts commemoration of a miracle.

He sets up the stones per the Lord’s instruction in 4:3, and then explains their significance to the nation.

21, The Purpose of the Memorial.—to stimulate generations yet to come to inquire concerning Israel’s history, and thus to cause the memory to be prolonged. Reminds us again of the importance of tangible memorials in instructing our children.

22-23, The Subject of the Memorial.—Joshua traces three steps in a causal chain:

1. We crossed Jordan with dry feet
2. Because the Lord dried up the Jordan
3. As he dried up the Red Sea.

Note the pronouns.

- “The Lord dried up the waters of Jordan from before *you*,” though the children in view have not yet been born.
- “the Red Sea, which he dried up from before *us*,” though most of those who crossed were born in the wilderness and did not themselves go through the Red Sea.

Shows their solidarity as a nation. They are to rejoice in the blessings of God on their fathers as blessings on them, for these past blessings made their position possible. *Application:* We often see this pattern in the Psalms, of praising God for his past blessings. When we're in the midst of present troubles, sometimes we get discouraged, but at times like these we should look back to God's great triumphs on our behalf, and rejoice in them.

24, *The Purpose of the Miracles.*—And why did God do these two great signs? Two reasons, one external and one internal.

- External: to show his strength to “the people of the earth.” Rahab’s response has already showed the effectiveness of the former miracle to this end, but the Hebrew expression (properly, “peoples of the earth”) has a broader reference than just Canaan. In the singular, the expression refers to the citizens of a specific land, but in the plural, it refers to all the inhabitants of the earth. Thus it reflects the foreign policy of Deut. 20, which anticipates Jewish campaigns against nations far off. (*Post-exilic books have a slightly different usage, in which the non-jewish inhabitants of Israel are called “peoples of the lands,” both terms plural, probably reflecting their origin as deportees under the Babylonian and Assyrian regimes.*)
- Internal: that his own people might fear him.

These two are the foundation for the nation’s victory in the conquest: an intimidated adversary, and their own steadfastness before the Lord.