

CHAPTER 4

This chapter gives a further account of the miraculous passage of Israel through Jordan.

I. The provision that was made at that time to preserve the memorial of it, by twelve stones set up in Jordan (v. 9) and other twelve stones taken up out of Jordan (v. 1-8).

II. The march of the people through Jordan's channel, the two tribes first, then all the people, and the priests that bore the ark last (v. 10-14).

III. The closing of the waters again upon their coming up with the ark (v. 15-19).

IV. The erecting of the monument in Gilgal, to preserve the remembrance of this work of wonder to posterity (v. 20-24).

◀◀ JOSHUA 4:1-9

THE PASSAGE OVER THE JORDAN

We may well imagine how busy Joshua and all the men of war were while they were passing over Jordan, when besides their own marching into an enemy's country, and in the face of the enemy, which could not but occasion them many thoughts of fear, they had their wives, and children, and families, their cattle, and tents, and all their effects, bag and baggage, to convey by this strange and untrodden path, which we must suppose either very muddy or very stony, troublesome to the weak and frightful to the timorous, the descent to the bottom of the river and the ascent out of it steep, so that every man must needs have his head full of care and his hands full of business, and Joshua more than any of them. And yet, in the midst of all his hurry, care must be taken to perpetuate the memorial of this wonderful work of God, and this care might not be adjourned to a time of greater leisure. Note, How much soever we have to do of business for ourselves and our families, we must not neglect nor omit what we have to do for the glory of God and the serving of his honour, for that is our best business. Now,

I. God gave orders for the preparing of this memorial. Had Joshua done it without divine direction, it might have looked like a design to perpetuate his own name and honour, nor would it have commanded so sacred and venerable a regard from posterity as now, when god himself appointed it. Note, God's works of wonder ought to be kept in everlasting remembrance, and means devise for the preserving of the memorial of them. Some of the Israelites that passed over Jordan perhaps were so stupid, and so little affected with this great favour of God to them, that they felt no concern to have it remembered; while others, it may be, were so much affected with it, and had such deep impressions made upon them by it, that they thought there needed no memorial of it to be erected, the heart and tongue of every Israelite in every age would be a living lasting monument of it. But God, knowing their frame, and how apt they had been soon to forget his works, ordered an expedient for the keeping of this in remembrance to all generations, that those who could not, or would not, read the record of it in the sacred history, might come to the knowledge of it by the monument set up in remembrance of it, of which the common tradition of the country would be an explication; it would likewise serve to corroborate the proof of the matter of fact, and would remain a standing evidence of it to those who in after-ages might question the truth of it. A monument is to be erected, and,

1. Joshua, as chief captain, must give direction about it (v. 1): *When all the people had clean passed over Jordan, not even the feeble, that were the hindmost of them, left behind, so that God had done his work completely, and every Israelite got safe into Canaan, then God spoke unto Joshua to provide materials for this monument. It is the pious conjecture of the learned bishop Patrick that Joshua had gone into some place of retirement to return thanks immediately for this wonderful mercy, and then god met him, and spoke thus to him. Or, perhaps, it was by Eleazar the priest that God gave these and other instructions to Joshua; for, though he is not mentioned here, yet, when Joshua was ordained by the imposition of hands to this great trust, god appointed that Eleazar should ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim, and at his word Joshua and all the children of Israel must go out and come in,* ^{<0271>}Numbers 27:21.

2. One man out of each tribe, and he a chosen man, must be employed to prepare materials for this monument, that each tribe might have the story told them by one of themselves, and each tribe might contribute something to the glory of God thereby (v. 2, 4): *Out of ever tribe a man.* Not the

Levites only, but every Israelite must, in his place, help to *make known to the sons of men God's mighty acts*, ^{<4512>}Psalm 145:12. The two tribes, though seated already in their possession, yet, sharing in the mercy, must lend a hand to the memorial of it.

3. The stones that must be set up for this memorial are ordered to be taken out of the midst of the channel (where, probably, there lay abundance of great stones), and as near as might be from the very place where the priests stood *with the ark*, v. 3, 5. This intended monument deserved to be made of stones curiously cut with the finest and most exquisite art, but these stones out of the bottom of the river were more natural and more apt indications of the miracle. Let posterity know by this that Jordan was driven back, for these very stones were then fetched out of it. In the institution of signs, God always chose that which was most proper and significant, rather than that which is pompous or curious; for *God hath chosen the foolish things of the world*. These twelve men, after they got over Jordan, must be sent back to the place where the ark stood, being permitted to come near it (which others might not) for this service: "*Pass over before the ark* (v. 5), that is, into the presence of the ark, which now stands in the midst of Jordan, and thence fetch these stones."

4. The use of these stones is here appointed for a sign (v. 6), a memorial, v. 7. They would give occasion to the children to ask their parents in time to come, *How came these stones hither?* (probably the land about not being stony), and then the parents would inform them, as they themselves had been informed, that in this place Jordan was divided by the almighty power of God, to give Israel passage into Canaan, as Joshua enlarges on this head, v. 22, etc.

II. According to these orders the thing was done.

1. Twelve stones were taken up out of the midst of Jordan, and carried in the sight of the people to the place where they had their head-quarters that night, v. 8. It is probable that the stones they took were as big as they could well carry, and as near as might be of a size and shape. But whether they went away with them immediately to the place, or whether they staid to attend the ark, and kept pace with the solemn procession of that, to grace its triumphant entry in to Canaan, is not certain. By these stones which they were ordered to take up God did, as it were, give them livery and seisin of this good land; it is all their own, let them enter and take

possession; therefore what these twelve did the children of Israel are said to do (v. 8), because they were the representatives of their respective tribes. In allusion to this, we may observe that when the Lord Jesus, our Joshua, having overcome the sharpness of death and dried up that Jordan, had opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, he appointed his twelve apostles according to the number of the tribes of Israel, by the memorial of the gospel to transmit the knowledge of this to remote places and future ages.

2. Other twelve stones (probably much larger than the other, for we read not that they were each of them one man's load) were set up *in the midst of Jordan* (v. 9), piled up so high in a heap or pillar as that the top of it might be seen above the water when the river was low, or seen in the water when it was clear, or at least the noise of commotion of the water passing over it would be observable, and the bargemen would avoid it, as they do a rock. Some way or other, it is likely, it was discernible, so as to notify the very place where the ark stood, and to serve for a duplicate to the other monument, which was to set up on dry land in Gilgal, for the confirming of its testimony and the preserving of its tradition. The sign being doubled, no doubt the thing was certain.

~~CHAP.~~ JOSHUA 4:10-19

THE PASSAGE OVER THE JORDAN

The inspired historian seems to be so well pleased with his subject here that he is loth to quit it, and is therefore very particular in his narrative, especially in observing how closely Joshua pursued the orders God gave him, and that he did nothing without divine direction, finishing all that *the Lord had commanded* him (v. 10), which is also said to be what *Moses commanded*. We read not of any particular commands that Moses gave to Joshua about this matter: the thing was altogether new to him. It must therefore be understood of the general instructions Moses had given him to follow the divine direction, to deliver that to the people which he *received of the Lord*, and to take all occasions to remind them of their duty to God, as the best return for his favours to them. This which Moses, who was now dead and gone, had said to him, he had in mind at this time, and *did*

accordingly. It is well for us to have the good instructions that have been given us ready to us when we have occasion for them.

I. *The people hasted and passed over*, v. 10. Some understand this of the twelve men that carried the stones, but it seems rather to be meant of the body of the people; for, though an account was given of their passing over (v. 1), yet here it is repeated for the sake of this circumstance, which was to be added, that they passed over *in haste*, either because Joshua by their officers ordered them to make haste, for it was to be but one day's work and they must not *leave a hoof behind*, or perhaps it was their own inclination that hastened them.

1. Some hasted because they were not able to trust God. They were afraid the waters should return upon them, being conscious of guilt, and diffident of the divine power and goodness.

2. Others because they were not willing to tempt God to continue the miracle longer than needs must, nor would they put the patience of the priests that bore the ark too much to the stretch by unnecessary delay.

3. Others because they were eager to be in Canaan, and would thus show how much they longed after that pleasant land.

4. Those that considered least, yet hasted because others did. He that believeth doth not make haste to *anticipate* God's counsels, but he makes haste to *attend* them, ^{<23816>}Isaiah 28:16.

II. The two tribes and a half led the van, v. 12, 13. So they had promised when they had their lot given them on that side Jordan, ^{<0827>}Numbers 32:27. And Joshua had lately reminded them of their promise, ^{<0012>}Joshua 1:12-15. It was fit that those who had the first settlement should be the first in the encounter of difficulties, the rather because they had not the incumbrance of families with them as the other tribes had, and they were all chose men, and fit for service, ready armed. It was a good providence that they had so strong a body to lead them on, and would be an encouragement to the rest. And the two tribes had no reason to complain: the post of danger is the post of honour.

III. When all the people had got clear to the other side, the priests with the ark came up out of Jordan. This, one would think, should have been done of course; their own reason would tell them that now there was no

more occasion for them, and yet they did not stir a step till Joshua ordered them to move, and Joshua did not order them out of Jordan till God directed him to do so, v. 15-17. so observant were they of Joshua, and he of God, which was their praise, as it was their happiness to be under such good direction. How low a condition soever God may at any time bring his priests or people to, let them patiently wait, till by his providence he shall call them up out of it, as the priests here were called to come up out of Jordan, and let them not be weary of waiting, while they have the tokens of God's presence with them, even the ark of the covenant, in the depth of their adversity.

IV. As soon as ever the priests and the ark had come up out of Jordan, the waters of the river, which had stood on a heap, gradually flowed down according to their nature and usual course, and soon filled the channel again, v. 18. This makes it yet more evident that the stop which had now been given to the river was not from any secret natural cause, but purely from the power of God's presence, and for the sake of his Israel; for when Israel's turn was served, and the token of God's presence was removed, immediately the water went forward again; so that if it be asked, *What ailed thee, O Jordan! that thou wast driven back?* It must be answered, It was purely in obedience to the God of Israel, and in kindness to the Israel of God. There is therefore none *like unto the God of Jeshurun; happy also art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, O people?* Some observe here, by way of allusion, that when the ark, and the priests that bore it, are removed from any place, the flood-gates are drawn up, the defence has departed, and an inundation of judgments is to be expected shortly. Those that are unchurched will soon be undone. The glory has departed if the ark is taken.

V. Notice is taken of the honour put upon Joshua by all this (v. 14): *On that day the Lord magnified Joshua*, both by the fellowship he admitted him to with himself, speaking to him upon all occasions and being ready to be consulted by him, and by the authority he confirmed him in over both priests and people. Those that honour God he will honour, and when he will magnify a man, as he had said he would magnify Joshua (~~CHR~~ Joshua 3:7), he will do it effectually. Yet it was not for Joshua's sake only that he was thus magnified, but to put him in a capacity of doing so much the more service to Israel, for hereupon they feared him as they feared Moses. See here what is the best and surest way to command the respect of inferiors, and to gain their reverence and observance, not by blustering and

threatening, and carrying it with a high hand, but by holiness and love, and all possible indications of a constant regard to their welfare, and to God's will and honour. Those are feared in the best manner, and to the best purpose, who make it to appear that God is with them, and that they set him before them. Those that are sanctified are truly magnified, and are worthy of double honour. Favourites of heaven should be looked on with awe.

VI. An account is kept of the time of this great event (v. 19): it was *on the tenth day of the first month*, just forty years since they came out of Egypt, wanting five days. God had said in his wrath that they should wander forty years in the wilderness, but, to make up that forty, we must take in the first year, which was then past, and had been a year of triumph in their deliverance out of Egypt, and this last, which had been a year of triumph likewise on the other side Jordan, so that all the forty were not years of sorrow; and at last he brought them into Canaan five days before the forty years were ended, to show how little pleasure God takes in punishing, how swift he is to show mercy, and that *for the elects' sake the days of trouble are shortened*, ^{<B12>}Matthew 24:22. God ordered it so that they should enter Canaan four days before the annual solemnity of the passover, and on the very day when the preparation for it was to begin (^{<B13>}Exodus 12:3), because he would have their entrance into Canaan Graced and sanctified with that religious feast, and would have them then to be reminded of their deliverance out of Egypt, that, comparing them together, God might be glorified as the *Alpha* and *Omega* of their bliss.

^{<B14>}JOSHUA 4:20-24

THE PASSAGE OVER THE JORDAN

The twelve stones which were *laid down in Gilgal* (v. 8) are here set up either one upon another, yet so as that they might be distinctly counted, or one by another in rows; for after they were fixed they are not call *a heap of stones*, but *these stones*.

I. It is here taken for granted that posterity would enquire into the meaning of them, supposing them intended for a memorial: *Your children shall ask their fathers* (for who else should they ask?) *What mean these*

stones? Notes, Those that will be wise when they are old must be inquisitive when they are young. Our Lord Jesus, though he had in himself the fulness of knowledge, has by his example taught children and young people to hear and ask questions, ^{<406>}Luke 2:46. Perhaps when John was baptizing in Jordan at Bethabara (the house of passage, where the people passed over) he pointed at these very stones, while saying (^{<409>}Matthew 3:9) *God is able of these stones* (which were at first set up by the twelve tribes) *to raise up children unto Abraham*. The stones being the memorial of the miracle, the children's question gave occasion for the improvement of it; but our Saviour says (^{<400>}Luke 10:40), *If the children should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out*; for one way or other the Lord will be glorified in his works of wonder.

II. The parents are here directed what answer to give to this enquiry (v. 22): *“You shall let your children know that which you have yourselves learned from the written word and from your fathers.”* Note, It is the duty of parents to acquaint their children betimes with the word and works of God, that they may be trained up in the way they should go.

1. They must let their children know that Jordan was driven back before Israel, who *went through it upon dry land*, and that this was the very place where they passed over. They saw how deep and strong a stream Jordan now was, but the divine power put a stop to it, even when it overflowed all its banks — “and this for you, that live so long after.” Note, God's mercies to our ancestors were mercies to us; and we should take all occasions to revive the remembrance of the great things God did for our fathers *in the days of old*. The place thus marked would be a memorandum to them: Israel came over this Jordan. A local memory would be of use to them, and the sight of the place remind them of that which was done there; and not only the inhabitants of that country, but strangers and travellers, would look upon these stones and receive instruction. Many, upon the sight of the stones, would go to their Bibles, and there read the history of this wondrous work; and some perhaps, upon reading the history, though living at a distance, would have the curiosity to go and see the stones.

2. They must take that occasion to tell their children of the drying up of the Red Sea forty years before: *As the Lord your God did to the Red Sea*.
Note.

(1.) It greatly magnifies later mercies to compare them with former mercies, for, by making the comparison, it appears that God is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

(2.) Later mercies should bring to remembrance former mercies, and revive our thankfulness for them.

3. They must put them in the way of making a good use of these works of wonder, the knowledge whereof was thus carefully transmitted to them, v. 24.

(1.) The power of God was hereby magnified. All the world was or might be convinced that *the hand of the Lord is mighty*, that nothing is too hard for God to do; nor can any power, no, not that of nature itself, obstruct what God will effect. The deliverances of God's people are instructions to all people, and fair warnings not to contend with Omnipotence.

(2.) The people of God were engaged and encouraged to persevere in his service “*That you might fear the Lord your God, and consequently do your duty to him, and this for ever,*” or *all days (margin)*, “every day, all the days of your lives, and your seed throughout your generations.” The remembrance of this wonderful work should effectually restrain them from the worship of other gods, and constrain them to abide and abound in the service of their own God. Note, In all the instructions and informations parents give their children, they should have this chiefly in their eye, to teach and engage them to *fear God for ever*. Serious godliness is the best learning.