

A Memorial Forever

Dr. Justo L. González



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Joshua 4

It was 25 years ago that I last stood behind his pulpit, enjoying the great honor and the even greater responsibility to bring you the Word of God on the Acacian of the ordination and installation of the new pastor. Now 25 years have passed, and I am once again pleased, honored, and overwhelmed to be here with you to celebrate and commemorate the lonely those 25 years, but all the years of the history of this church.

Before I read the Scripture lesson for tonight, from the book of Joshua, allow me a few words of introduction setting the story income thanks.

The children of Israel have just completed 40 years of wandering in the desert. 40 years of wonder at what God had done in the Red Sea. 40 years of wonder at the provision of manna. 40 years protesting that bondage in Egypt was better than wandering in the desert. 40 years eating mana and yearning for the onions and the cucumbers of Egypt. 40 years of freedom marred by idolatry and disobedience. 40 years!

The old generation that left Egypt is now gone. Moses is gone. The desert is behind. They are tired of wandering. They wish to settle. They remember the old promises made to Abraham. They have already conquered some fertile land on the east side of the Jordan, and this has become the possession of the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and of the half-tribe of Manasseh. Finally, there are some victories!

But before them lie new difficulties. Before them lies the river Jordan, and beyond the river peoples so big and powerful that when Moses sent spies into the land the vast majority of them reported there were unconquerable – that they were so big and powerful that next to them the children of Israel seemed as grasshoppers.

We know the story. Trusting God, they decide to cross the Jordan, and God opens the river before them, so they can cross into the promised land. It is then that the text says Joshua did something strange following God's direction. I read from Joshua 4, beginning on verse 4, and on to 7:

Then Joshua summoned the twelve men from the Israelites, whom he has appointed, one from each tribe. Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, one for each of the tribes of the Israelites, so that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do these stones mean to you?' Then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off in front of the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the Israelites a memorial forever.

The children of Israel cross the river Jordan in what is clear one more of the mighty acts of God. They are finally at the promised land destination point. What should they do? Show they celebrate? Should they just have a big party? No, they will build a monument.

I can imagine that there were probably some Canaanite spies looking at the procedures. If so, I can imagine them returning to their kings and leaders by saying, "These people are here to stay! They are building a monument!"

And this is in fact what they are doing. The pile of stones they are building is in itself of no particular practical use to them. Quite possibly, in the immediate days and early years, they will simply walk by stones and think that much of them. They will not think much of them, because they witnessed the actual event; because the stones are not really meant for them, but for

succeeding generations, so that when your children, and your children's children ask you, "what do these stones mean to you?" They will be able to tell the story again, and the stones will be a memorial forever.

In a word, the monument at Gilgal, though a monument to the past, is in fact a message to the future. The people crossing the Jordan are not putting the stones there so they may remember.

They are putting the stones there so that their children will remember.

