

## Joshua Chapters 3 and 4- John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is: "What does it mean to enter the Promised Land and why is this event so significant"? The book of Joshua dedicates two chapters to the event of the Israelites crossing the Jordan River and entering the Promised Land for the first time. If we have so much text dedicated to this moment in time, it must be pretty important. ☺
  - a) Again, why is this event so significant?" Why not just say, "God made it so the Israelites could cross this river and start conquering the land"? That's the whole lesson in one line.
  - b) To answer the question, I have to remind all of us of the significance of the Promised Land and what that term symbolizes: The idea of entering the Promised Land is all about learning to trust God with every aspect of our lives. It is about letting go of one's fears and trust in the fact that God exists and He cares about our lives. Further, God wants to see us live out a life "with purpose". That purpose is to glorify God in all that we do.
    - i) Symbolically speaking, the purpose of the Israelites wandering in the desert for 40 years was about letting go of their fears and learning to let go of the "world's way" of living. In other words, it is about getting our focus on God, and not on our self.
    - ii) So are you saying we all have to change our lives and be full time missionaries? No. I am saying if we trust in Jesus for the payment for our sins and believe He is God, then we already are missionaries whether we realize it or not. God wants our lives to make a difference for Him in all that we do.
    - iii) I heard a rabbi put it well once time: (Paraphrasing) "The purpose of life is not to see how much money we can make. If that is the true, then life on earth ultimately has no purpose as we all we are doing is making money and collecting stuff that does us no good when life is over. On the other hand, if we live our lives to make a difference for the God who created this world, then life has purpose."
  - c) That surprisingly, leads us back to the lesson title. Learning how to live for God is represented by the idea of "entering the Promised Land". That is why this event is so important and is so "memorialized" in these two chapters.
2. Let me explain this lesson from what was literal happening to the Israelites.
  - a) These two chapters are about Joshua leading the Israelites into the Promised Land.
  - b) At this point in time, the Israelites have "finished" their 40 years of wandering in the desert. They are currently living east of the Jordan River. The land of Israel (i.e. the Promised Land) is on the other side of the river.
  - c) God is going to give Joshua the instructions on how to lead the Israelites across the Jordan River into the Promised Land and the Israelites follow Joshua's command.
  - d) We're going to discover in this lesson that it is not just a matter of God saying in effect, "OK, everybody, cross the river and then, start fighting whoever is there". ☺ There are rituals involved in this crossing. God actually makes the river stop flowing so the Israelites can cross easier. There is a specific set of rituals that God ordains as to how the river is to be crossed and what the Israelites are to do to remember this event.
3. Let me address those who already familiar with the concept of "living for God".
  - a) Let's say we already know that living for God is about trusting Him with every aspect of our lives. How do we apply this lesson?
    - i) First of all, it is to never forget that fact. Further, we are to pass that knowledge on to future generations to learn to trust God with every aspect of our lives.
    - ii) When things are "falling apart" around us, we are to remember that God is still in charge and still cares deeply about our lives. The same God who performs this great miracle of making the river stop flowing so the Israelites could cross it, is the same God that cares about every (emphasis on every) aspect of our lives.

- b) I've learned that worrying is the opposite of faith. When we are having our doubts about how God is going to get us out of particular situation is when we worry. As my wife taught me, "If you are going to pray, why worry? If you are going to worry, why pray?" Our problem is we expect God to work on our timing or work things out "our way" as opposed to doing things "His way".
  - c) Remember that prayer is for God to get things done on His timing and His way. We don't always know what that way is, so it is ok to ask things of God do be done our way or on our timing. What we have to accept is that if the answer is "no" or "wait" then we have to accept God's answer to our prayer as what is best for our lives at that moment.
    - i) God wants us to learn from those difficult moments to learn to trust Him "even more so" and remember that He does have a plan for our lives.
  - d) Finally, remember that trusting God is always a moment-by-moment thing. God gives us freewill and even if we have been a believer for many years, God always gives us the choice at any moment to trust Him or not trust Him with the any particular situation.
    - i) I usually find that my greatest moments of failure come from trying to do things by my own efforts as opposed to learning to trust God with the situation.
    - ii) I'm not saying every effort we make in life will produce success. I am saying that if we trust God, in the end "we do win" as we are to live for His purposes and not ours. If we do that, we are guaranteed to "win in the end" as God wins in the end.
4. Chapter 3, Verse 1: Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over.
- a) It would help to discuss what was happening in the verses leading up to this moment: In the last part of Chapter 2, we had two Israelite spies returning from Jericho and telling Joshua in effect that everyone in Jericho is afraid of the Israelites.
  - b) Joshua then tells all the Israelites that in three days time, everyone will move from their current location in "Shittim" to the east bank of the Jordan River. (The exact location of Shittim is debated among scholars. Don't worry, that's not on the final exam. ☺) Most scholars believe Shittim was a few miles east of the river.
5. Verse 2: After three days the officers went throughout the camp, <sup>3</sup> giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it.
- a) There is a debate among scholars over the "three days issue". Some believe that when Joshua got to the riverside, then he gave the order to wait another three days before the actual crossing began. Others argue that the two spies from the last chapter came back prior to the "three day command". In other words, some people think the total time from Shittim to the river was a little over six days and some think it was just three days. Now that you know both sides of the explanation, forget about it. ☺
  - b) Here is what is important: Joshua gave this order for the Israelites (again, probably one to two million people) that after three days, the "ark of the covenant" will lead the procession to cross the river.
  - c) OK, time for a quick history review on just what is the "Ark of the Covenant".
    - i) When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, God told the Israelites to build a tabernacle to worship Him. Inside that tabernacle were a bunch of "things", the most important of which is the "ark of the covenant".
    - ii) It is essentially a box that is roughly 2 feet by 3 feet by 2 feet. The lid was detached. Two statues of angels were carved on the lid. This box was to stay inside the tabernacle at all times. It was the most holy object in the tabernacle and it represented the presence of God Himself.
    - iii) Yet, now the "box" was to be taken out of the tabernacle and lead the procession. Why? The answer is it represents the presence of God and He "Himself" will lead the Israelites across the river into the "Promised Land".

- d) There are 12 tribes (families) that make up the nation of Israel. One of those 12 tribes was the Levites. They were in charge of the tabernacle and moving the ark.
    - i) For the purpose of this public demonstration of the Ark of the Covenant leading the way across the river, four unnamed Levites were to carry the Ark. I forgot to mention, the Ark also had four rings on the edges so that two poles were inserted through the rings. These four priests could carry the ark via the two poles.
  - e) All of this background is necessary, just so that you and I understand that it is the "presence of God" leading the way into the Promised Land.
    - i) This leads back to what the "Promised Land" represents: It is about living the rich, full life that God desires for us. In order to live that type of life, one must trust God and follow where He leads us. He leads us into the "Promised Land".
    - ii) This leads to the "purpose" of crossing the river. In a "sense" the Israelites were already saved in the sense they trusted in the God who got them out of Egypt. The idea of crossing the Jordan is about taking that salvation "one step further" in that it is about trusting their lives to God in all that they do.
    - iii) Many people believe that Jesus died for their sins, but don't take the next step of trusting God with their lives. The Israelites leaving Egypt and going through the Red Sea was like their baptism. (See 1st Corinthians 10:2) Crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land is like learning to trust God with every aspect of one's life.
6. Verse 4: Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it."
- a) Remember that there are over a million Israelites on the east side of the Jordan River. Joshua announces that the "Ark of the Covenant" (as carried by four people) will lead the procession across the river. Joshua says, "then you will know which way to go". What he meant by that is the Israelites are to follow "God" (i.e., the Ark of the Covenant) across the river and then God will lead them into their new life.
  - b) The text mentions that there is to be a thousand yard separation between the Ark of the Covenant and the people. The literal Hebrew says "two thousand cubits", which is roughly 1,000 yards. The main point being that the Ark is to be far enough in front so that all of the Israelites can see it leading them across the river.
  - c) So why does the text specify "two thousand cubits" as a specific distance? Some commentators theorize on the significance of that number, but the simple truth is, it is enough of a distance where this entire group could see the ark crossing the river first.
7. Verse 5: Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."
- a) When Joshua tells the people to "consecrate themselves", it means to spiritually prepare for "the big day". In a literal sense, it means to be spiritually pure. For a Jewish person that would include such things as to not touch anything unclean (certain types of animals or anything dead) and the avoidance of sexual activity for one day. The idea is that these things made one focus on God and His requirements for new life.
  - b) For the Christian, these purification laws do not apply to us. The New Testament makes it very clear that we are not under the law. (See Galatians 5:18). At the same time, if we are going to live a new life trying to please God in all that we do, that does mean we are to make an effort to separate our lives for God from the way non-Christians live.
    - i) So how does a Christian "separate themselves" for God? This is letting God work through us to change us for the better. Think about the Christian concept of "faith and works": We are saved by faith, but that faith causes good works.
  - c) The next thing to notice is the word "amazing". This is the same word in Hebrew used to describe what happened when God "beat up" ☹ the Egyptians with all the plagues and the miracle of the crossing of the Red Sea. Joshua is promising more "amazing" things and is referring to the Jordan River stopping its flow so they could cross it.

- d) The point here is that Joshua is saying, "If you are willing to separate yourself for God and are willing to enter this new life in the Promised Land, then you will see miracles that "match" what your parents saw when they left Egypt forty years ago.
- i) Yes, Joshua is referring the Jordan River parting so the Israelites could cross. What Joshua is saying in effect is "If one learns to trust God with all of one's life, then one will see things more "amazing" than one can ever imagine.
  - ii) For the Christian making the decision to live for God, we too will see things more amazing than everything and anything "this world" has to offer. We as Christians have the privilege of leading others to Christ and watching them get saved. Yes there are other miracles, but those other miracles only last a lifetime at best.
  - iii) The greatest miracle is still seeing one get saved and drawing closer to God. That alone is worth the effort of (spiritually speaking) "crossing the Jordan" which again, represents entering our new life of trusting God with our life.
8. Verse 6: Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the Ark of the Covenant and pass on ahead of the people." So they took it up and went ahead of them.
- a) Verses 1 to 5 all involve "preparation" prior to the big move across that river.
  - b) Verse 6 begins the actual moving of everyone to cross the Jordan River.
  - c) In this verse, the priests in charge of the ark, moved in front of the Israelites, bearing the Ark of the Covenant on their shoulders.
  - d) Let me stop for one more bit of symbolism. (Lord knows I love this stuff. ☺). Why was the ark carried across the river? The idea is that we as believers in God have to "carry" God wherever we go. It does not mean God is so weak he has to be carried. It means that we choose to take God with us wherever we go in our life.
9. Verse 7: And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses." <sup>8</sup> Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: "When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river." "
- a) OK, we interrupt this river crossing procession for God to speak a few words to Joshua. God tells Joshua, "(Go) tell the priests who are carrying the ark, to approach the river and stand in the river." This statement requires a great act of faith. One of the reasons God spoke to Joshua at this point is that it would take a great act of faith and trust for the priests to actually step in the river.
    - i) We will discover in a handful of verses that the Jordan River overflows at this time of the year. The river is normally about 3 feet to 10 feet deep, depending upon where one is standing on the river or the time of the year. The water that flows in the Jordan comes from the snow that rests in the mountains of Israel that then flows into the Sea of Galilee. The strongest time of the year for the river is the spring when the snow melts and fills the Sea of Galilee.
    - ii) My point is the river is rushing at the time of the year when the Israelites crossed it. Therefore, it took a great act of faith on behalf of the priests to carry the ark to step in the river. In order to encourage the priests, God gave the command.
  - b) Ponder this question: Do you think Joshua was nervous about being the leader? Remember that God only ordained Joshua with the "be strong and courageous" speech of Chapter 1 only a few days earlier. Now that the actual process of crossing the Jordan has begun God picks this exact moment to reassure Joshua of his leadership role.
  - c) Notice that God "responds" to Joshua to encourage him. After Joshua told the priests carrying the ark to go into the river, then God interrupts this process to praise Joshua.
  - d) I don't know for sure if Joshua was aware of the river stopping before this point. Joshua knew that God was going to do "amazing things" and that probably meant stopping the river in a miracle that matched the parting the Red Sea forty years earlier.
  - e) Next comes the actual river crossing. Before we do that, it's time for a quick speech by Joshua. (Joshua wouldn't be a real leader if he didn't stop to give a political speech. ☺)

10. Verse 9: Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. <sup>10</sup> This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites.
- a) First, notice that Joshua knows the names of all the tribes that are currently living in the Promised Land that they (The Israelites) will drive out. Even though the Israelites have lived for 40 years in the desert and before that in Egypt, they knew who was there.
  - b) Before you worry about the names of all of these tribes, let me remind you of a principal I learned about teaching the bible: "Who cares about the Hitties, Perizzites and Amorites, when I have bills to pay and a family to take care of?" The point of that expression is not to get too bogged down in the historic details, but to focus on how the Scriptures relate to our lives. That is why I try focus on how these facts relate to our lives today.
  - c) With that said, notice "who" will drive out these people: Verse 10 says that God will drive these people out before you. What that means is if the Israelites are willing to engage them, they cannot lose as the battle has already been "won".
    - i) What does that mean for you and me? These other tribes symbolically represent the sins that exist in our life. If we desire to deal turn from sin, then God promises that He will help to drive out that sin from our lives. In other words, the outcome of our battles has already been determined if we are willing to follow God.
    - ii) Let me put this another way: As we live the Christian life we become aware of our individual sin issues. God is promising us that we can have victory over our sins issues, which is our "current residents" in our life. We have to be willing to follow God and let Him lead us to victory over the sin issues we face.
  - d) Meanwhile, Joshua is still addressing all the people:
11. Verse 11: See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. <sup>12</sup> Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. <sup>13</sup> And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD--the Lord of all the earth--set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap."
- a) Joshua points out to the Israelites that the "Ark of the Covenant" will go into the river first. Again, that ark represents the "presence" of God. The Israelites understood that it is God who is leading them in the conquering of the "Promised Land".
  - b) Joshua then announces in Verse 12 that each of the twelve tribes must pick out a man from their tribes. The purpose of the "man from each tribe" is coming up later in the chapter, but it has to do with gathering some stones out of the river.
    - i) Remember that there is probably one to two million people standing there. How do they fairly quickly pick a leader from each of their twelve tribes? I suspect that each tribe already had some leaders and the various leaders quickly huddled and picked one leader to represent each tribe.
  - c) Joshua then announces to everyone that as soon as the priests carrying the ark step in the water, the river will stop flowing. How did Joshua know this? I suspect God told him, but those specific words of God telling Joshua were not recorded until now.
  - d) Imagine four guys carrying a big box via two long sticks. They have to walk as a team. Imagine telling them to step into the edge of a fast-flowing river. They had to be scared of what was going to happen to them. It took an act of faith for those four men to actually step in the river and Joshua is reassuring them of a miracle that is about to happen.
    - i) It is one thing to predict a miracle before it happens. It is another to actually step in the river "in faith" that the miracle really will happen. Therefore, give a little credit to the four priests carrying this box ("The Ark") in front of all the Israelites.
    - ii) One has to remember that the generation seeing this miracle were not alive when God parted the Red Sea and did not see all of the "bad stuff" happened to the Egyptians prior to the Israelites leaving Egypt.

- e) I'm sure the current generation of Israelites heard the stories of these events, but never saw it themselves. All they know is they have spent the last 40 years burying their parents and grandparents after wandering around in the desert. Now they pick four guys to go stand in the river while Joshua says in effect, "Now watch the river stop!"
  - f) Let me put the "river crossing" another way: God could have told the Israelites to wait a few more months before crossing the river. At that time, the river would flow much more slowly and everybody could "wade" across the river. What's the purpose of having the river miraculously stop so everyone could cross? It is to teach the current generation of Israelites to "walk by faith" and follow God's lead.
    - i) God wants to lead us into a new life of trusting Him with every aspect of our life. That means to follow God wherever and whenever He wants to lead us. Often that path of following Him leads to ways in which we by ourselves might ask, "God why are you taking me down this path? There is no way for us to live if we go the way You want us to go?" God often works in our lives in a way where He brings us to the "edge" so that the only way to go forward is to let God work in a way we have to give God all the credit for getting us through that situation.
    - ii) In other words, if the Israelites waited a few months and just "waded" across the river, they wouldn't be certain God was leading them. By this miracle, they would know for sure God was leading the way.
  - g) OK, time for the big miracle itself. ☺
12. Verse 14: So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. <sup>15</sup> Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, <sup>16</sup> the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho.
- a) Verse 14 tells us the priests moved toward the river. Verse 15 is the verse that tells us the Jordan is at "flood stage" when the Israelites actually crossed the river. Verse 15 then says as soon as the priests touched the edge of the water, river stopped.
  - b) Verse 16 gives us some "footnotes" about the river flow. Apparently the river stopped at a place called "Adam" (no relation to "the" Adam). The way God stopped the river was apparently that the river backed up at this place called Adam. Speculation is that there was some sort of mudslide or maybe an earthquake caused the water to accumulate at "Adam" and it backed up long enough for millions to cross. So is there a connection between "the" Adam and this town caused Adam? I believe so in the sense that Adam's sin is what caused sin to be in the world. God "stopped that sin" long enough to "cross" it. Symbolically speaking, "trusting in God and following Him is our victory over sin".
  - c) The important point is that God's "timing" is perfect. The exact moment the priests set their feet in the water was the exact moment the water stopped flowing. Technically the water must have stopped flowing a bit earlier in order for it to be dry ground at that moment of stepping in, but I'm being technical. Personally, I don't care how God stopped up the river or "when". A God that is capable of creating the world is capable of having a river stop up at an exact moment. The point for us is to know that God worked on "His timing" so that the Israelites crossed the riverbed when it was "dead dry".
  - d) Stop and think about one million-plus people crossing this now-dry riverbed. That would take some time. Understand that they did not cross single-file next to the Ark of the Covenant. I suspect that everyone went straight across.
  - e) Think about this from the perspective of those living in Jericho. I'm sure they had their spies on the other side of the river keeping an eye on the Israelites. Then "all of sudden" the river dries up and this huge mass of people crossed the river. That had to scare them.

13. Verse 17: The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.
- a) We end this chapter with one final reference to the priests themselves. I'm sure the priests who were holding the ark were thinking things like, "I hope everyone hurries and gets across before the river comes back and yes, this box is getting heavy." ☺
  - b) It took faith for the Israelites to trust in God. It took more faith for the people carrying the Ark of God as they were the ones who had to stand there until every last person crosses.
  - c) The text says "dry ground". I have to admit I wondered if the ground was still wet from the previous river flow or if God dried up the river so thoroughly, the ground was as dry as the desert on both sides. I get the idea from the text that when God dries up a river, He doesn't mess around and the floor of the riverbed was dry to the touch.
    - i) I know it is human nature to test things. I wonder how many Israelites as they were crossing the river reached down to feel if the riverbed was dry. I suspect many of them did. That is why I believe we have an emphasis on dry ground.
    - ii) In the meantime, I visualize the priests saying, "Come one everyone, let's go!"
14. Chapter 4, Verse 1: When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, <sup>2</sup> "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, <sup>3</sup> and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight."
- a) Now that everyone has crossed the river, except for the priests holding the ark in the riverbed, God gives one more command prior to the priests coming out of the riverbed.
    - i) God tells Joshua to pick 12 men, (one from each tribe) and to go get stones from the riverbed and carry out 12 stones (one per man) to build a monument.
    - ii) In other words, God wanted the Israelites to always remember this event and build a monument out of stones to remember this event.
  - b) OK, so why do this? Isn't it enough for everyone to just remember the miraculous river crossing? Why go one step further and build a monument to remember the event?
    - i) I believe the answer is because the problem with signs from God as that we have a short memory span. Once the Israelites have to start facing their enemies "face on", it is easy to forget how God has worked in the past in our lives.
    - ii) Building this monument is something these Israelites can visually look at to remind them of the miracle of God Himself leading them into this land.
  - c) OK, does this mean we are to build a monument when God does something great in our life? No, God does not require we stack some stones to remember each victory. ☺ On the other hand, it is often good to journal or do something to remember God's victories in our lives to help us through the "low moments" when we don't sense God's presence.
    - i) As we live our Christian lives, there are often times when God goes "silent". What I mean by that is we are still saved, but God is testing our faith and we can't sense His presence at that moment. Often we need to remember past times of God helping us to remind ourselves that God is still there.
15. Verse 4: So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, <sup>5</sup> and said to them, "Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, <sup>6</sup> to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' <sup>7</sup> tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."
- a) In the first three verses of this chapter, we had God giving Joshua the command to get the stones out of river. In these verses, we have the 12 men actually go each get a stone. Notice that each man is to get one stone that is big enough to carry on his shoulder.

- b) The stones are then piled together where the Israelites are now camping on the other side of the river. The purpose of the pile of stones is then stated in Verse 6: It is so that when their children ask what are these stones mean, the Israelites are then to tell their children that this pile of stones is a reminder of how God got them across the river.
    - i) These verses imply that in the future, the Israelites are to make field trips with their children to go visit these stones and tell their kids about the event.
16. Verse 8: So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the LORD had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down.
- a) Here is what caught my attention: Why spend 9 verses saying what one can say in one or two sentences. The text could have just said, "And the Israelites set up 12 stones as a memorial to this event." There, I just combined 9 verses in one sentence. ☺
  - b) In other words, why does the bible spend so much text on memorializing this event and even setting up a monument for future generations to stare at? As a comparison, there was no memorial set up to the Red Sea crossing. Let's face it, God could have told everyone to set up a small pile of stones in each of their homes to remember this event and that "could be" just as good.
    - i) Back to the question: Why did God require this group of probably several million to set up one specific pile of 12 stones right by the river to remember this event?
    - ii) Yes the answer is given in the text, in that it is so future generations of Israelites can go "stare at this pile of stones" and then parents can tell the story to their children of how God Himself lead this group of people into the land.
    - iii) Personally, I see it as a little more than that. There is a reason God picked "stones" as a monument as opposed to say, sheep to be sacrificed to remember this event. It gets back to remembering what "is" the Promised Land: It is about learning to trust God with every aspect of our lives.
    - iv) With that said, our "hearts", without God, are like stones. In the New Testament, Christians are called "living stones". (See 1st Peter 2:4-5). If there is no "next life", than whatever we do in this life eventually has no purpose. If the earth is going to burn up one day, it does not matter how good we are as people, as eventually, life would have no purpose. Having a heart for God not only gives us new life, but also gives us a purpose for living greater than anything this life has to offer.
      - a) To have that understanding of "living for God" is symbolically like taking a "dead stone" and giving it new life "In the Promised Land".
    - v) With that in mind, when parents make field trips with their children to visit this pile of 12 stones, they can tell the story not only of God drying up the river, but how that God has called all of us to live a new life for Him in all that we do. In that sense, this "pile of stones" represents new life where people from all 12 tribes are combined as one to work together to make a difference for God.
  - c) Now that I've finished my theory on the purpose of the stones, let's get back to the text.
17. Verse 9: Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day.
- a) The text is a little confusing unless you understand that there are "two sets" of 12 stones. There are the 12 stones that the Israelites carried out of the dry river bed to make the "stone pile" on the west side of the river. In Verse 9, we have another "twelve stones" as carried by Joshua Himself. This second set of 12 stones came from the west side of the river and was placed in the middle of the river where the priests were standing.
  - b) OK, so why have this second set of stones? Is it so it "evens out" the number of stones that were taken out of river? I don't think so. Who would see these stones other than scuba divers? ☺ Maybe the stones would be visible when the river was at a low point. I don't know for sure. So, what do this second set of stones mean?

- i) For starters, it was Joshua's own memorial of how God did this great miracle of stopping the river flow so the Israelites could cross on dry ground.
  - ii) Next, it is respect for the Ark of the Covenant itself. One has to remember that when God told Moses to build this thing, it was to remain in the tabernacle and it is only to be seen by the High Priest, and even then he could only see it on a once per year basis. By Joshua setting up the stones in the river, it is to remember how God Himself made His presence known in the middle of river.
  - iii) So why put the stones in the middle of the river, as opposed to next to the river where people could see it? The idea is to mark the spot where God worked.
  - c) OK John that's neat. How do we apply it? Sometimes it is good to remember the spot where God worked in our lives and somehow memorialize that spot to remember.
  - d) I'm not saying we have to literally put a pile of stones where God worked in our lives. I am saying that remembering how God worked in our lives is a good thing. If we set up a visual reminder for us, again, that can be helpful in times where God is silent in our lives.
18. Verse 10: Now the priests who carried the ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything the LORD had commanded Joshua was done by the people, just as Moses had directed Joshua. The people hurried over,<sup>11</sup> and as soon as all of them had crossed, the ark of the LORD and the priests came to the other side while the people watched.
- a) Meanwhile, we still have the priests standing in the river. ☺ I bet they thought, "Could everybody hurry up and cross, before God changes His mind about the river flow?"
    - i) Remember they had to wait, for roughly 1-2 million people to cross that river. That had to take some time, no matter how wide of a gap was the crossing point.
  - b) The point is the moment all of this work was done, the priests carrying the Ark hurried across the riverbed. As soon as the priests crossed it, the river was back to it's normal self.
  - c) If you recall from earlier in the lesson, the river was stopped up at some location called "Adam". What probably happened was some sort of mudslide or earthquake that caused the river to fill up a newly created "hole" at this location. The "fill up" reached the point where it overflowed and now the river started down the path it went before the "fill up".
  - d) Imagine if you are the Israelites on the west side of the river, now watching this event. Let's say you hurried across the river and now every last person made it across. You saw in the distance the priests hurrying across, and then suddenly a storming, fast flowing river started down that path again. Seeing all of that would make you or I realize that we were just part of a major miracle that God pulled off.
19. Verse 12: The men of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over, armed, in front of the Israelites, as Moses had directed them.<sup>13</sup> About forty thousand armed for battle crossed over before the LORD to the plains of Jericho for war.
- a) If you recall from Chapter 1, there was an issue that among the 12 tribes of Israel, two and one half tribes wanted to live on the other side (east side) of the Jordan River. Joshua told those two and one half tribes that they can settle there, but the grown men of those tribes had to cross the river and help fight the inhabitants of the land. This verse mentions that about 40,000 armed men, from those two and one half tribes did cross the river. What is implied is that their wives and children did not join in the crossing and stayed on the east side of the Jordan River.
  - b) If crossing the Jordan is symbolic of one's new life in Christ, Joshua wanted to encourage everyone (but not force everyone) to make that journey. By having the "fighting men" cross, they too, can experience the "rich full life" of trusting God and take that experience back with them to the east side of the Jordan river when this war was over.
  - c) What is also implied, but not stated, is that Joshua expected this battle against the inhabitants of the land to last less than a full time, so that those who wanted to live their lives east of that river could do after the war was won.

20. Verse 14: That day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they revered him all the days of his life, just as they had revered Moses.
- a) The main purpose of Chapters 3-4 was to teach the Israelites to learn to trust God, and that is why they crossed the river. A second purpose was to get the Israelites to trust Joshua as their leader. Let's face it, having this big a crowd crossing over a dry river bed when that river is normally rushing is enough of a miracle to get the people to trust in Joshua as their leader.
  - b) Joshua was a great leader because he understood that the "chain of command" went from God through him, to the Israelites. A secret of good leadership is to be willing to trust in God and follow His lead.
    - i) So how do we apply Joshua's leadership ability to us? Joshua had God audibly speak to him. We don't get that. ☺ How do we become good leaders in our lives? The answer is if and when one is called to some sort of leadership role in any capacity, is that as a leader, one should still submit their lives to God. That means that one should pray and seek God's guidance on a consistent basis (say every day) and be in God's word on a regular basis. At that point, one should simply "move on" and make wise decisions with the assumption that God is leading.
21. Verse 15: Then the LORD said to Joshua, <sup>16</sup> "Command the priests carrying the ark of the Testimony to come up out of the Jordan." <sup>17</sup> So Joshua commanded the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan." <sup>18</sup> And the priests came up out of the river carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD. No sooner had they set their feet on the dry ground than the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and ran at flood stage as before.
- a) In these verses, we have God commanding the priests who were carrying the ark to come out of river. The text mentions that the moment they were out of the riverbed, the river started back up again at full strength.
  - b) What is to be gathered out of this, besides the fact that God performed a mighty miracle here, is that God was in control of the situation the whole time. The river stopped the moment the priests set foot in that river. The river started up again the moment they were out. If God stopped the river using some sort of "natural catastrophe", notice how the timing worked out perfectly in that it was not a moment too soon or too late.
  - c) It is another reminder that God knows all things and God can "arrange all things" to suit His purpose on His timing. It is amazing how much time we spend worrying about life given the fact that God is in control and God arranges all thing for his glory.
    - i) I can just hear people saying, "Well, I've never had a "major river stop" as to help me out with my issues. How is it fair to compare this event to our lives?"
    - ii) The answer is to remember that if we are saved, that alone is a miracle to be remembered and to be grateful for. God never promises us that we will live "x" number of years. What God desires for us is to live to glorify Him in all that we do. If we live for Him, God is willing to work with us in our lives to make a difference for Him. Sometimes God may visually show us a great miracle and other times God will be "working in the background". The point is that He is always there working whether we sense Him or not at any given moment.
    - iii) My point here is (for all of us) to let go of worrying. One has to pray at times, "I am going to trust God in this situation so therefore, I am not going to worry about the outcome." God already knows what the outcome will be and He wants us to pray for His will to be done for the sake of our comfort and knowledge.
    - iv) Since we don't always know what is God's will, it is ok to pray for "our will" in any given situation. At the same time we must accept the idea that if the outcome is different from what we desire, it is because God desired something different from that situation.

22. Verse 19: On the tenth day of the first month the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho.
- a) We get told here the date on the Jewish calendar when all of this took place. It is on the 10th day of the first month of the Jewish calendar. It is in the springtime.
  - b) So what is so significant about this date? Let me give you a clue: It was on the 14th day of the first month (of the Jewish calendar) when Jesus was crucified. It is the 14th day when the Passover ritual is performed. On the 10th day is when the lambs were selected for the Passover ritual.
    - i) The 10th day is also in effect, "Palm Sunday". It is the day that Jesus said in effect to Israel "Choose me as the one you look to for your salvation".
    - ii) OK John, so the date of the river crossing is the same date as Palm Sunday. What's the big deal? Just as this date historically is the date God asks the Israelites to "choose Him", (Palm Sunday) it is also the date "symbolically" where God asks the Israelites to "choose to live for Him" in the new land of Israel.
    - iii) Remember that crossing the Jordan is the equivalent of beginning a new life trusting God. It is the day one "chooses" to trust God.
    - iv) So the date historically "just happens" to line up with the date that God asks the Israelites to choose their lambs for the Passover sacrificial meal and God asks the Israelites to "choose Jesus" as their ultimate sacrifice for their sin. Nice coincidence, huh? ☺
  - c) The Israelites are now camped west of the river, just outside of Jericho. This has to be scary for those living in Jericho. Yes, they feared this large multitude when they were east of the river. Now that they have crossed the river, I suspect the king of Jericho and his guards were now even more scared for their own future.
    - i) This leads us back to Rahab from the last chapter. Lots of people fear the wrath of God, but only some like Rahab are willing to "do something" about that fear and actually desire to turn to God for protection.
  - d) Speaking of fearing God and "doing something about it", notice these final verses:
23. Verse 20: And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. <sup>21</sup> He said to the Israelites, "In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, 'What do these stones mean?' <sup>22</sup> tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.' <sup>23</sup> For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. <sup>24</sup> He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God."
- a) Now that the Israelites have actually crossed the Jordan, one would think the next order of business would be either to focus on setting up camp or focusing on how to attack Jericho. Instead, Joshua understands that the next order of business is to show gratitude for God and he sets up this "stone monument" with the stones taken from the river.
  - b) The chapter ends with a review of things that have already happened. The text already mentioned setting up this monument. Couldn't the last five verses simply say, "And Joshua set up the stone monument" and moved on from there?
    - i) My question is in effect, "Why did God spend so much text in this chapter talking about remembering and memorializing this event? Yes it is a great miracle and one that these Israelites will remember the rest of their lives. Still, why set up a memorial for future generations?"
    - ii) It goes back to the significance of the event itself. God told Abraham over 400 years earlier that this land would belong to his descendants. The Israelites who are the direct descendants of Abraham now number in the millions are fulfilling that promise of God.

- iii) The monument helped the Israelites remember that God orchestrated all this. The fact that Jewish people have now lived in that land for the better part of several millenniums is due to the fact the Israelites were willing to trust God and "take that step" of crossing over the Jordan and go into the land.
  - c) The important thing to pass on to our children is about learning to trust God with every aspect of our lives. That is symbolically what crossing the Jordan River was all about. Just as winning the wars in the Promised Land is all about trusting God, so is winning our wars over sin all about trusting God.
  - d) After one becomes aware of what Jesus did for our sins, the next thing we become aware of (over time) are the sins that currently exist in our life. God wants us to deal with our sins and trust Him to help us deal with those sin issues. That act of learning to trust God on a "moment by moment" basis is what living for God is all about and is the "key point" of living in the Promised Land.
  - e) Since I'm on a roll here, let's stop here and go to closing prayer:
24. Let's pray: Father, Help us to learn to trust You in every aspect of our lives. We don't know what is going to happen to us today or in the future, but we know that You know all things and You have wonderful plans for our lives. Help us to work for Your glory in all that we do and trust in the fact that You know the outcome of all things. Further, we ask your help in dealing with the sin battles that we must fight, just as Joshua trusted in You to lead the battles that He had to fight. Guide us, for Your glory, in Jesus name, Amen.