

THE TWELVE STONES

Joshua 4:1-24

Key Verse: 4:23

"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."

In the previous chapter we studied how God enabled the people of Israel to cross the River Jordan just as he had dried up the Red Sea in Moses' time. We learned in the last chapter the greatness of God's command to his people and the absolute obedience of his people, especially, General Joshua's faith and obedience. Today's passage tells us how they crossed the River Jordan and moved on to Gilgal to make a better plan against the invincible fortress of Jericho. In this passage we learn God's absolute command and the people's absolute obedience while they were closing up the River Jordan crossing. This passage clearly tells us that the author wrote this passage of closing up the crossing of the River Jordan in order to teach them a sense God's history. We are living in an overly pragmatic culture. So history doesn't mean much to many people. In the past oratory, history, philosophy and astronomy scholars received Ph.D.'s. All the technical schools were called professional schools. Technical studies were regarded as technical training. Since pragmatism has been practiced at large all the technical students have been gradually recognized as worthy of getting Ph.D.'s. On the other hand, philosophy and history professors who were highly honored as Ph.D.'s in the past, now have to work during summer vacations to support their families. It is because they receive one third of the pay of technology

professors or physicians. But today's passage teaches us that history is very important to those who know God.

First, God commands Joshua (1-3). General Joshua and his people crossing the River Jordan is indeed a remarkable historical event. General Joshua and his people wanted to have a great party to celebrate their victory in crossing the River Jordan. Throughout history, this has been the high spirit of a triumphant general and his soldiers. When the whole nation had finished crossing the River Jordan, the Lord commanded General Joshua, "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, 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." God knew General Joshua and his soldiers had had enough hard time to cross the River Jordan according to God's command. God knew how much his people felt like they were melting in fear, and at the same time they were completely exhausted. It was the time to relax a little bit. In this moment, God's thunderous command fell upon General Joshua. The Lord said to Joshua, "Choose twelve men from among the people 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." Probably, General Joshua did not know why God commanded him to carry out twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan where the ark of God had been. General Joshua was very tired. His soldiers were also very tired. In this situation, to bring twelve stones from where the ark of the Lord stood seemed to have been ridiculous. But General Joshua did not think so, because it was God's command. May the command of God rule and overrule us.

Second, General Joshua commands the Israelites (4-7). Here we learn General Joshua's absolute obedience to God's command. His absolute obedience is exemplary forever. And we must also follow his example. Why did General Joshua obey God in that way? Because he loved God and because he loved the Law of God. John 14:15 says, "If you love me you will obey what I command." At the Christmas Worship Service, 1999, we made an offering for the purpose of subsidizing the suffering countries where our missionaries work, such as Yugoslavia. During the bombing so many people died in Yugoslavia. After the bombing, people were dying in hunger and from spreading diseases. So many were dying, even more than those who died in the time of bombing. Not only in Yugoslavia, but also in China our missionaries were suffering because they were forbidden to proclaim the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Chinese people are really afraid of other countries' religions after the opium war with England. We also thought about subsidizing Russia, especially, the Siberian area, and several African countries. After Christmas we called each place about our subsidy as a Christmas gift. They were not so happy. They thought that we were bothering their self-supporting spirit. They thought they should suffer together with the mission land people and die together. They didn't want our subsidy. Thank God for our missionaries' faith and high morale. But we found a way to send money to North Korea through third generation American missionaries to Korea who are helping TB patients in seven clinics in North Korea. One of them came to our Korean staff meeting and enjoyed fellowship with our staff members. We are ready to help his ministry because if we do so, our offering seems to be used very properly and prayerfully. We are happy to give all the money we gathered for the TB patients in North Korea because we love God and because we are willing to obey God's command absolutely, like General Joshua and

his people. Until we love God, we cannot obey God's words absolutely.

Third, the Israelites obey Joshua. (8-13) So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, 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." General Joshua's command was thunderous and the twelve men, one from each tribe, were dumbfounded. At this moment, Joshua knew that the twelve leaders from the twelve tribes did not know the meaning of it. But General Joshua, who loved God, knew the meaning of bringing out twelve stones on their shoulders. So General Joshua gave them a hint by saying, "To bring the twelve stones on your shoulders is to serve as a sign among you." But the twelve leaders didn't understand. Then he explained in a little more detail. "When your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' 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" (7).

After hearing from General Joshua the historical significance, the Israelites did as General Joshua had commanded. "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" (8). "And the stones are there to this day" (9). This story tells us that if a leader loves God and God's word his followers also love God and obey God and, according to Bible chemistry, they and their children are blessed. May God help us to honor America's godly heritage.

Fourth, the priests finally come out of the River Jordan with the ark of God (14-18). Look at 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." Here we learn that a leader must be recognized by God. Then people recognize their leader from their hearts. We also learn that recognition comes from God Almighty. There are many kinds of leaders in this world but true leaders are those who are recognized by God through their love of God and obedience to his word. We can see this picture through Moses, and now through Joshua. God exalted General Joshua, not only for his achievement in crossing the Jordan but also in organizing his people as soldiers of God by obeying his command.

Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Command the priests carrying the ark of the Testimony to come up out of the Jordan." So Joshua commanded the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan." After a long time, the priests were allowed to come up out of the river carrying the ark of the covenant of the Lord. No sooner had they set their feet on dry ground than the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and ran at flood stage as before and the cold sweat ran down the backs of the priests. It is very interesting to examine the story about the priests who were carrying the ark of the Lord. They were standing there until 400,000 Israelites crossed the River, and until twelve leaders, one from each tribe, came back and carried a stone out of the river on their shoulders from the place where the priests were standing with the ark of the Lord. Plainly speaking, the priests who carried the ark of the Lord were the first ones to step in the River Jordan. It was a terrifying moment when they had to step in the river, but they overcame by faith and they put their trembling feet

in the water of the River Jordan. And they had to stand in the middle of the River Jordan until 400,000 Israelites passed through, and then twelve leaders, one from each tribe, came back and took a stone on their shoulders and went back to Joshua, their commander. Priests are the same as shepherds. A shepherd must first step in the River with his feet. In short, a shepherd must have faith in God. Next, a shepherd must be patient in doing God's work. When the 400,000 Israelites crossed over the River Jordan by God's grace, it was natural for the priests to come out of the River Jordan, following in the rear of the people. But they were waiting for General Joshua's command to come out. Here we see that shepherds cannot be shepherds with their own strength. Each person has his limits in everything, therefore the priests' patience could run out while they were waiting for Joshua's command to come out. Instead of General Joshua's command to come out, he sent twelve young men to take twelve stones. Finally, everything was completed. General Joshua then commanded them to come out of the River Jordan with the ark of God. When the priests came out of the River Jordan with the ark of God after completing all their mission, they felt as if they had become baldheaded. In spite of their achievement, General Joshua didn't admire them at all. General Joshua thought they had only done their mission. They had the privilege of doing God's holy mission and they fulfilled God's holy mission. They were only to praise God for the privilege of being priests and shepherds.

Fifth, General Joshua's battle plan (19-24). What did General Joshua do for his battle plan? First, he let the people move up from the Jordan and camp at Gilgal on the eastern side of Jericho. Then they were supposed to conquer the Promised Land by many battles and wars. The first thing General Joshua did was to set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had

taken out of the Jordan. General Joshua was convinced that as God enabled them to cross the River Jordan, he would conquer the Promised Land. As his expression of faith in God and a sign of the conquest of the Promised Land, he set up the twelve stones he had taken from the River Jordan. It was the symbol of God's victory. It was the symbol of the victory of God's people. Moreover, it was a succession of God's history.

Setting up the twelve stones was to teach a sense of God's history to his descendants. Read verses 21-23. "He said to the Israelites, "In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, "What do these stones mean?" tell them, "Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground." 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." May God help us to teach the history of God to our children!

God knew General Joshua and his people were very tired after crossing the River Jordan. Especially the priests who carried the ark of the Lord and had stood in the middle of the Jordan were the most tired. But God did not hesitate to teach them a sense of history. What is history? Without God there is no history. Only God's history is the true history. And all mankind are included in God's history. For example, man's history is the history of struggling to survive and then disappearing like the mist. Where is Julius Caesar? Where is Ghengis Khan? Where is Bismark? Where is Napoleon Bonaparte? and General Patton? When there is God, human history exists. We have many kinds of history books. I have read many, but I find that French history and Spanish history are most inspiring because they have long histories and many things have

happened. But we cannot say anything about them except men were born and died. But the people of God have a sense of history. They know God's history and remember it and live up to it. For example, at the beginning of the conquest of the promised land, the twelve stones were very significant for the descendants of the Israelites. Without the meaning of the twelve stones they did not have any meaning to fight and conquer and possess the Promised Land God gave them.

We have a very accurate and precise history of God. Even little children like Father Abraham and sing about him, stomping and shouting. So many people remember a man of meditation and a wife lover, Isaac. We also remember the incredibly wretched Jacob and his change in God into Israel. When we read the Bible, we see that Matthew 1:1 says, "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." This one verse summarizes Bible history. In Bible history, there are so many good people and so many bad people. But as long as Bible history continues, the world is under the sunshine. When we think about the Christian Crusades in which people spent thirty years to recover Jerusalem, we know that it was partially the Roman Catholic Church's politicking. But one thing is sure, so many people want to see the place where the good Jesus lived and died on the tree. There are so many good people when they know God and his son Jesus Christ. In the past, America sent one million missionaries to foreign lands. Around 100 years ago when Oriental or Indian people saw white Americans they stopped to see how they looked like or why American noses were so high. So a missionary's life mostly began like a monkey in a zoo and then gradually they got to know native people. Next, they dared to learn the native languages and they had to overcome cultural differences. American missionaries built

schools and hospitals and began to heal and educate people, teaching them to read and write.

How about now? There are many short term tourist missionaries from America. But true missionaries who live in the native mission field permanently are very rare. We must pray that God may make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation when we have a sense of history, overcoming terrible situation ethics. We must pray that missionary vision may be restored through our one-to-one Bible study. May God bless America, especially American mothers and mother candidates. May God be pleased when we follow God's plan to make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.