

ISRAEL REMEMBERS GOD'S DEEDS

Nicole tucked the corner of a piece of paper onto her bulletin board. Taped to it was a broken car key from her “only God” story.

About a month prior, Nicole’s maternal grandmother—affectionately known as Madear—had passed away. As a young college student, Nicole could never have afforded a plane ticket to attend the funeral. She had to make the ten-hour drive by herself.

Nicole grew up hearing Madear’s testimonies about the goodness of the Lord. These were often fantastic adventures! Nicole’s mother was also fond of sharing accounts of the Lord’s faithfulness. In each of their homes, Nicole always remembered the special places reserved for “trophy of intercession.” These were physical reminders of God’s faithfulness and answered prayers. Nicole hadn’t started collecting any trophies herself—until recently.

On the long drive home, she stopped at a busy rest area. As she turned off her car, the key broke in her hand, leaving a blade stuck in the ignition, with hardly any metal sticking out. She realized she would never be able to pull it out with fingernails, and Nicole began to cry and to pray, “Please, God, I don’t know what to do!”

She saw the couple in the car next to her notice, and a man stepped out to offer help. He returned with a tool to pull the key blank out, and Nicole said a silent prayer of thanks that she happened to have a spare in her purse. As she finished reminiscing, her roommate came into the room. “How come you’re keeping a broken car key?” she asked.

1 What kind of legacy with God does your family or church have to celebrate?

2 Have you ever considered keeping a physical item to help you remember God’s goodness? When?

¹⁴ On that day the LORD magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life.

¹⁵ And the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying, ¹⁶ Command the priests that bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan.

¹⁷ Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan.

¹⁸ And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before.

¹⁴ That day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him all the days of his life, just as they had stood in awe of Moses.

¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Joshua,

¹⁶ “Command the priests carrying the ark of the covenant law to come up out of the Jordan.”

¹⁷ So Joshua commanded the priests, “Come up out of the Jordan.”

¹⁸ 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.

The Lord Directs Joshua

Our reading picks up just as crowds of people have crossed the Jordan, since God created a dry path for them. Crossing the Jordan River marks a pivotal moment in Joshua's leadership. It is the first of many responsibilities he assumes as Israel's leader as appointed by God. He wants to guide the people to receive the promises of the covenant and the bountiful goodness in the land. But before they can even enter the land, they need to remember that it is God's presence who goes before them.

On this day, the Lord exalts Joshua before the whole of Israel, thus fulfilling His earlier promise (see 3:7). God's exaltation is not about individual fame; but it publicly confirms that God is with Joshua, just as He had been with Moses. This affirmation mirrors Moses' own experience after crossing the Red Sea, when the people feared the Lord and trusted Him and Moses. Like the leader before, Joshua's authority relies on God, who works through him.

The Israelites stand “in awe” of Joshua, meaning they revere and

respect him (4:14). They followed his instructions to the letter, and everything happened as he had said. The ark of the covenant had been carried into the flooded river first, and the waters piled up from flowing downstream (see 3:13). Just try to imagine the feeling of walking past a deluge of water being held at bay by God's hand! Following the Lord's instructions and remembering these mighty deeds will be central to their life in Canaan, where success is directly tied to faithful observance of the covenant expectations.

Verses 15–18 complete the miracle, since the waters continue to wait until the priests are completely clear. The priests begin to clear the river at Joshua's signal, and God's control over nature is shown again by restoration of the river's rushing flow at the instant the last foot is clear (v. 18). This miraculous crossing has a theological message: entering the land happens only with God's help.

1 What is significant about God's exaltation of Joshua before all Israel?

2 What are some of the ways that the text emphasizes that this is a miracle?

3 How is this water crossing like and unlike the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus?



The use of standing stones or *matzevah* is known from several moments in Scripture. Standing stones mark key moments in Israel's history with God (see Gen. 28:18, 22; Ex. 24:4; Josh. 4:20).

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¹⁹ And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho. ²⁰ And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. ²¹ And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? ²² Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. ²³ For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: ²⁴ That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever.

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. ²⁰ And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. ²¹ He said to the Israelites, “In the future when your descendants ask their parents, ‘What do these stones mean?’” ²² tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ 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 what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. ²⁴ 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.”

Twelve Memorial Stones

After coming up from the Jordan, the people camp in Gilgal, located on the eastern border of Jericho (Josh. 4:19). Until this point, the narrative has not clarified the timing of the crossing of the Jordan, other than stating that the Jordan is flooding, which would be in the spring. Only now does the text clarify that the Israelites come out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month. This is the month of Nisan, the time of Passover. Once again, the author is drawing a close connection between the events of Exodus and the crossing of the Jordan.

Twelve stones that had been gathered from the Jordan are set up in Gilgal. One day, the Israelites will be asked by their children and grandchildren, “What do these stones mean?” And in response, the parents will share the story of when Israel crossed the Jordan on dry land, even during the flood season. Thus the stones are a memorial

for future generations, a reminder of what God has done for them. In drying up the waters, God reveals that He alone has power over all—not only over Israel’s enemies, but over creation itself.

As Joshua instructs the people on these stones of remembrance, he makes a direct comparison between the crossing of the Jordan River and that of the Red Sea. God has once again performed an amazing act of power. For a moment, think about what it must have been like for this generation to have been raised in the wilderness, hearing all about an escape from Egypt when God’s mighty hand had overcome pursuing chariots. For the next generation, this sign at crossing the Jordan inspires them to have greater confidence. Perhaps where their parents had grumbled and showed ingratitude, they would set a new pattern of faithfulness before God.

And now as word of Israel’s crossing spreads, more people come to know the power of the Lord. God has been building a name for Himself among the people, including those who are not Israelites. As for the Israelites, they are to look upon these remembrance stones to see firsthand evidence of God’s power. They hope to walk before God in faithfulness, keeping the blessings of covenant before their eyes.

1 Why is the timing of the Jordan crossing significant?

2 What was the purpose of the twelve stones in Gilgal?

3 What were the two reasons God performed the miracle at the Jordan?

Remembering God's Faithfulness

For decades, my dad has kept a prayer journal. But after writing his requests, he always leaves some space. When God answers those prayers, my dad flips back in his journal to his request, and in that blank space writes every detail of how and when God answered it.

And wow, does he remember God's faithfulness! He recalls distant memories of what God has done in his life and in the lives of others. He connects the dots to find answered prayers in unexpected places. But as someone who doesn't keep a journal, I struggle to recall all of the goodness God has shown me. Even my most difficult struggles can, over time, fade from memory. How easy it is to forget what God has done! If Israel needed a monument of stones to remember the Jordan drying up, how much more do we need reminders of God's work, both large and small?

The twelve stones at Gilgal served as a memorial, reminding future generations of God's faithfulness. This theme of remembrance carries into the New Testament. The writer of Hebrews encourages believers to remember when God had sustained them through hardship, so that they would persevere in the present (see Heb. 10:32–36). Peter reminded believers of their calling and election so that they would “always be able to remember,” even after his death (2 Peter 1:12–15). Remembering is key to perseverance.

As believers under the new covenant, we, too, need to remember God's saving acts. When we participate in the Lord's Supper, we do so in remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice. But that's only one example of remembrance. Whether through the formality of a prayer journal or through ordinary items (a sticky note with a verse, a favorite piece of artwork, a picture), we should always find ways to remind ourselves and others of God's faithfulness.

1 Why do you think God wants His people to remember His saving works?

2 What memorial practices do we have today?

3 How can we encourage one another to remember God's faithfulness?

Stones of Remembrance

When in your life did God come through in a powerful way? Sometime this week, write down a prominent moment of God's faithfulness in a location where you can access it in the future (perhaps a journal). This will serve as a "stone of remembrance," helping you to trust the goodness of God in a time of uncertainty to come.

God showed His mighty power and faithfulness when . . .

Key Text

And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. —Joshua 4:21–22 KJV

He said to the Israelites, "In the future when your descendants ask their parents, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.'" —Joshua 4:21–22 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of September 14 through September 19

- Mon.** Deuteronomy 7:1–11—Live as Holy People.
- Tue.** Deuteronomy 7:12–26—God Will Love and Bless.
- Wed.** Philippians 4:10–19—Strengthened in Every Circumstance.
- Thu.** 2 Corinthians 10:1–5, 15–18—Armed for Spiritual Warfare.
- Fri.** John 16:23–33—Christ Has Overcome the World.
- Sat.** Joshua 10:40–11:5—God Fights for God's People.

Next Week: Joshua 11:6–9, 16–23

Consider this question: What is a blessing in your life that can only be credited to God—not to you or your own abilities?