

September 13, 2026

“Israel Remembers God’s Deeds”
Lesson 2

Joshua 4:14-24

Intro

Between last week’s lesson (Josh. 1:1-11) and today’s (Josh. 4:14-24), several significant things happened. Joshua sent spies into the land, whose lives are spared by Rahab, a Canaanite woman, hiding them. They tell Joshua that an Israelite victory is certain. Joshua then leads the people about 5 miles west to a place they will cross the Jordan River. They camp for three days, likely because there are so many people who have to be instructed. Numbers 26 says there were over 600,000 men aged 20 and older. If women and children are included, there is likely at least 3 times as many, close to 2 million or more. The priests enter the river, carrying the ark. At that moment, the waters upstream stopped flowing. As long as the priests and the ark remain in the river, the people are able to cross over on dry ground. Joshua picks 12 men, one from each tribe, and has them pick up a stone from the middle of the (for the moment) dry river bed. These stones are arranged to serve as a sign or memorial for future generations to remember God’s deliverance at that spot. As our lesson begins, almost all of Israel has crossed the Jordan River on dry ground. The priests with the ark will exit last.

Read Joshua 4:14-24

1. vs. 14: God delivers on His promise to Joshua in 3:7, to exalt him in the sight of the people
 - Being exalted here means the people have complete confidence in Joshua
 - The people “stood in awe of him”—not just now, but “all the days of his life”
 - They revered and respected Moses; now a new Moses is here, worthy of their respect
 - He has only led them across the Jordan River, but the miracle presented adds to their awe
 - Joshua had served Moses “since youth” (Num. 11:28)
 - By the time of Moses’ death, Joshua has had years of experience as a servant leader
2. vs. 15: Though short, this verse shows an important aspect of Joshua’s leadership
 - God communicates His will and commands to Joshua
 - Joshua isn’t doing his own thing; He is hearing from God and following His plans
3. vs. 16-17: At this point, the priests holding the ark are still in the river
 - God directs Joshua to tell them to come out of the river, with the ark
 - The ark held the original 10 commandments
 - It was put in the portable tabernacle, where the priests led worship
 - The ark and its contents symbolize the relationship between God and His people
 - It reminds Israel of God’s constant presence
 - It is crucial that the people and the leaders remember God’s promises
 - It is crucial that they stay obedient to what the Law says
4. vs. 18: The priests do as Joshua instructs, coming out of the river with the ark
 - Two amazing details follow this information
 - First, the waters return as soon as “they set their feet on the dry ground”

Second, the detail is given that the waters were at flood stage “as before”
The priests entered the river at flood stage and stopped it by God’s power
The ground was *dry* that the people went across
This event didn’t happen during heat and drought; it was in the spring flood season
This timing shows that it was by God’s hand and not some natural event

5. vs. 19: The first month of the Jewish calendar is Aviv in Exodus, about late March and early April
This time of the year confirms the high water levels of the river
During the Babylonian exile, the name of this month become Nisan
It is on the 10th day of this month that the people go camp on the eastern border of Jericho
6. vs. 20: Joshua here takes the 12 stones taken from the river and sets up a monument
This is not an altar, but a memorial of what God has done
12 stones for the 12 tribes; all of Israel is to remember how God has taken care of them
The exact arrangement isn’t known; it must be visible as a reminder to the people
7. vs. 21-22: Joshua reminds the people that they are to know and pass on to others the stones’ meaning
He knows there will be future generations who will ask about the stones
The people who are asked are to say, “Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground”
This memorial is there to remind all that the God of Israel brought the people to this land
It was not done by pagan gods like Baal, and it was not just some coincidence
8. vs. 23: The words to say in response to the questions are continued here
“God dried up the Jordan”; “God did to the Jordan what He did to the Red Sea”
Again, this highlights God’s hand in the people’s journeys
It was he who made the waters stand up and the river bed become dry ground
In creation, God separated the waters from dry land
What He did then, He can do again; He has total control over all parts of His creation
9. vs. 24: God’s plans for the memorial go farther than just Israel
It is for “all the peoples of the earth”
God may have used Israel as His instrument, but His plan was always for all peoples
The various peoples in Canaan will see the stone at times, a reminder of God’s works
But as His chose people, Israel is to see this physical reminder and “fear the Lord”
This “fear” is a reverence for God and for doing His will
This fear is “the beginning of wisdom” says Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10

Application: One of Joshua’s first actions as leader was to institute a memorial. Before the people went further into the land, they collectively paused to ensure remembrance of the Lord’s providing a way to cross the Jordan River. God provides, the people ensure remembrance, and then they move on. If we pay attention to God’s work, we will find moments where he has provided for us. When we notice God’s work, we can build our own memorials to His work. We may not construct a stone monument, but we would be wise to develop ways to remember and celebrate God’s work and faithfulness.

Prayer: Father God, You have always done mighty works for Your people, highlighted by Your saving acts through Jesus Christ. Strengthen our resolve to remember Your acts as recorded in Scripture, and especially those acts we have personally experienced. Help us to fully understand Your steadfast faithfulness. In Jesus' name, Amen.