

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

When the people are passed over, Joshua commands twelve men, one taken out of each tribe, to take up a stone on his shoulder out of the midst of the river, and carry it to the other side, to be set up as a memorial of this miraculous passage, Joshua 4:1-7. They do so, and set up the stones in the place where they encamp the first night, Joshua 4:8, Joshua 4:9. The priests stand in the river, till all the people are passed over, Joshua 4:10, Joshua 4:11. Of the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, 40,000 fighting men pass over with the other tribes, Joshua 4:12, Joshua 4:13. Joshua is magnified in the sight of the people, and they fear him as they did Moses, Joshua 4:14. The priests are commanded to come up out of the river, which, on their leaving it, immediately returns, and overflows its banks as before, Joshua 4:15-18. This miraculous passage takes place the tenth day of the first month, Joshua 4:19. The stones are set up in Gilgal, and Joshua teaches the people what use they are to make of them, Joshua 4:20-24.

Verse 2

Take you twelve men - From Joshua 3:12, it appears that the twelve men had been before appointed, one taken out of each of the twelve tribes; and now they are employed for that purpose for which they had been before selected.

Verse 3

Where ye shall lodge this night - This was in the place that was afterwards called Gilgal. See Joshua 4:19.

Verse 4

Twelve men, whom he had prepared - This must refer to their appointment, Joshua 3:12.

Verse 6

This may be a sign - Stand as a continual memorial of this miraculous passage, and consequently a proof of their lasting obligation to God.

Verse 9

And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan - It seems from this chapter that there were two sets of stones erected as a memorial of this great event; twelve at Gilgal, Joshua 4:20 and twelve in the bed of Jordan, Joshua 4:9. The twelve stones in the bed of Jordan might have been so placed on a base of strong stone-work so high as always to be visible, and serve to mark the very spot where the priests stood with the ark. The twelve stones set up at Gilgal would stand as a monument of the place of the first encampment after this miraculous passage. Though this appears to me to be the meaning of this place, yet Dr. Kennicott's criticism here should not be passed by. "It is well known," says he, "that when Joshua led the Israelites over Jordan, he was commanded to take twelve stones out of the midst of Jordan, to be a memorial that the ground in the very midst of that river had been made dry. But where was this memorial to be set up? The ninth verse says; Joshua set up these stones in the midst of Jordan. But is it likely that the stones should be placed or set down where they were taken up; and that the memorial should be erected there where, when the river was again united, it would be concealed, and of course could be no memorial at all? This however flatly contradicts the rest of the chapter, which says these stones were pitched in Gilgal, where Israel lodged in Canaan for the first time. The solution of this difficulty is, that בִּתְּוֹךְ (bethoch) in the midst, should be here מִתְּוֹךְ (mittoch), From the midst, as in Joshua 4:3, Joshua 4:8, Joshua 4:20, and as the word is here also in the Syrian version. The true rendering therefore is, And Joshua set up the twelve stones (taken) From the midst of Jordan," etc. I confess I see no need for this criticism, which is not supported by a single MS. either in his own or De Rossi's collection, though they amount to four hundred and ninety-four in number. Twelve stones might be gathered in different parts of the bed of the Jordan, and be set up as a pillar in another, and be a continual visible memorial of this grand event. And if twelve were set up in Gilgal as a memorial of their first encampment in Canaan, it is still more likely that twelve would be set up in the bed of the river to show where it had been divided, and the place where the whole Israelitish host had passed over dry-shod. The reader may follow the opinion he judges most likely.

Verse 10

And the people hastened and passed over - How very natural is this circumstance! The people seeing the waters divided, and Jordan running back, might be apprehensive that it would soon resume its wonted course; and this would naturally lead them to hasten to get over, with as much speed as possible. The circumstance itself thus marked is a proof that the relater was an eyewitness of this miraculous passage.

Verse 12

The children of Reuben, and - Gad - Concerning the numbers of these tribes that stayed behind to take care of the women, children, and cattle, and which amounted to 70,580 men, see the note on Numbers 32:17.

Passed over armed - See the note on Joshua 1:14.

Verse 14

The Lord magnified Joshua - See the note on Joshua 3:7.

Verse 18

The waters of Jordan returned unto their place - It is particularly remarked by the sacred historian, that as soon as the soles of the priests' feet touched the water, the stream of the Jordan was cut off, Joshua 3:15, and the course of the river continued to be inverted all the time they continued in its channel; and that as soon as the soles of their feet had touched the dry land, on their return from the bed of the river, the waters immediately resumed their natural course. All this was done by the sovereign influence of that God whose presence was represented by the ark of the covenant.

Verse 19

On the tenth day of the first month - As the Israelites left Egypt on the fifteenth day of the first month, A.M. 2513, (see Exodus 14:1-31), and they entered into Canaan the tenth of the first month, A.M. 2553, it is evident that forty years, wanting five days, had elapsed from the time of their exodus from Egypt to their entrance into the promised inheritance.

Encamped in Gilgal - That is, in the place that was afterwards called Gilgal, see Joshua 5:9; for here the name is given it by anticipation. In Hebrew, גלגל (gal) signifies to roll; and the doubling of the root, גלגל (galgal) or (gilgal), signifies rolling round and round, or rolling off or away, because, in circumcising the children that had been born in the wilderness, Joshua rolled away, rolled off completely, the reproach of the people. From this time Gilgal became a place of considerable eminence in the sacred history.

1.It was the place where the Israelitish camp rested the first night of their entering into that land which had been promised to their fathers from the days of Abraham.

2.It was the place in which Joshua circumcised all the people who had been born in the wilderness, during the forty years of their wandering, after they left Egypt.

3.It was the place in which Joshua had what we might term his fortified camp, and to which he and his army constantly returned after each of their expeditions against the inhabitants of the land.

4.It appears to have been the place where all the women, children, cattle, and goods, etc., were lodged, probably during the whole of the Canaanitish war.

5.It was the place where they celebrated the first passover they kept in the promised land.

6.It was the place where Saul, the first king of Israel, was proclaimed.

7.There the manna ceased to fall. And,

8.There the ark was fixed till, after the conquest of the country, it was removed to Shiloh. Gilgal was about ten furlongs from Jericho, and fifty from Jordan: Jericho being on the west, and Jordan on the east, Gilgal being between both. See Josephus, De Bello, etc., lib. v., c. 4, and Calmet on this place. Calmet supposes there was neither city nor town here before the arrival of the Israelites.

Verse 20

Those twelve stones - It is very likely that a base of mason-work was erected of some considerable height, and then the twelve stones placed on the top of it; and that this was the case both in Jordan and in Gilgal: for twelve such stones as a man could carry a considerable way on his shoulder, see Joshua 4:5, could scarcely have made any observable altar, or pillar of memorial: but erected on a high base of mason-work they would be very conspicuous, and thus properly answer the end for which God ordered them to be set up.

Verse 22

Then ye shall let your children know - The necessity of an early religious education is inculcated through the whole oracles of God. The parents who neglect it have an awful account to give to the Judge of quick and dead.

Verse 24

That all the people of the earth might know - It is very likely that גלגל (galgal) means simply, all the people of this land - all the Canaanitish nations, to whom, by the miracles wrought in

behalf of his people, he intended to show his eternal power and Godhead, the excellence of his protection, and the unavailableness of human might against his omnipotence; and the miracles he wrought for this people, in the sight of the heathen, were well calculated to make these things known.

1. God intends that his religion should be maintained and propagated in the earth; therefore he has given a revelation of himself to men, that it may be taught in the world; and he particularly requires that parents should be diligent and fervent in teaching their children the knowledge of his name.

2. This is one great use of the ordinances of the Gospel, and the rites of religion. They are all signifiers of sacred things, and point out matters of infinite importance beyond themselves.

3. A spirit of inquiry is common to every child: the human heart is ever panting after knowledge; and if not rightly directed when young, will, like that of our first mother, go astray after forbidden science.

4. If we wish our children to be happy we should show them where happiness is to be found. If we wish them to be wise, we should lead them unto God by means of his word and ordinances. It is natural for a child to inquire, "What do you mean by this baptism? - by this sacrament? - by praying - by singing psalms and hymns?" etc. And what fine opportunities do such questions give pious and intelligent parents to instruct their children in every article of the Christian faith, and in every fact on which these articles are established! Oh why is this neglected, while the command of God is before our eyes, and the importance of the measure so strikingly obvious?