

Memorial Stones

- Summer, vacation, St. L; visited Jefferson National Expansion Memorial – Arch. Been there? Impressive; older 2 kids to top; Miss R., city. Built in 60s, coms western progress made by so many Pioneers heading to western frontier, many of whom passed through St. L. So arch mems imp part American history. Guess in history mood that vac; way home, Springfield, IL, visited tomb of A Lincoln. Been there? Also impressive. Large stone mon, statue Lincoln in front; tall obelisk on top; inside circular walkway; in back, tomb. Whole mon mems great pres.
- When want com/mem great person or imp event, so that gens to come will remember what hap, what person did: often build mem. Cems filled with mem stones to com deceased. Sometimes in flower gardens, smaller mem stones, remind us of loved ones. Go to Wash DC, lots of mons – mems, etched in stone to honor/teach/remind, so that all who visit will remember, never forget.
- Today's OT reading all about mem stones; re mons, made of stone, that Israelites built to honor God, remind themselves and future gens of imp events that took place at Jordan R. Today Josh 4. Rem: last Sun, Josh 2, where Rahab helps spies. Now in ch. 3-4, see how Israelites cross Jordan. Awesome event; here's what happened: spies make it back to camp, give report; Josh moves whole community a few short miles to banks of Jordan, right on edge of Promised Land. No small group; perhaps ~2 mil people! Up in front, priests, carrying ark of covenant. In ch. 3, told river was at flood stage, because this was spring flood season. Remember in July, when Fox R overflowing, rushing so fast under (almost over) bridges in Burl? That's what's here: river ~100 ft across, over 12 ft deep, strong rushing currents; dif to cross. But ch. 3: **“As soon as the priests carrying the ark reached the Jordan, their feet touched the water at its edge and the water flowing downstream stood still, rising up in a mass that extended as far as Adam, a city next to Zarethan.”** (~20 miles away; like Fox R in downtown Burl winding all way well into IL – huge expanse of dry riverbed!) **“...The priests carrying the ark of the LORD's covenant stood firmly on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel crossed on dry ground until the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan” (Josh 3:15-17).** Incredible miracle! More; jump to ch. 4, our lesson, **vs. 18.** Picture: earth under feet rumbling like earthquake because 20 miles away massive heap water racing toward you like tsunami; closer/closer, louder/louder, until crashes into riverbed before you with Niagara Falls force. (I bet people closest to river were in splash zone!) You're an Israelite, safely on other side, in Canaan, land God promised give you, your people all way back in days Moses; now he's finally brought you there; and you've just witnessed this incredible miracle of the almighty Lord.
- Event worth commemorating, isn't it? **Vs. 4-6a.** Mem stones. **Vs. 20.** Not just little rocks; big stones, for big monument, to com big event. And lest we fail to notice this little detail, **vs. 9.** Means Josh set up 2 mons, one at camp in Gilgal, another in middle of river.ⁱ And even with torrential waters rushing back into riverbed, mem stones still stood, maybe just peaking above water during flood season, but standing tall, proud for all to see when water would subside in dry season. Here in Burl, by riverwalk, we could mark how high river water got in our flood in July. In St. L I saw markers for how high Miss R got in great flood 2011. Israelites, with this river monument, could mark: exactly where priests were standing while God held river back, and exactly how high water rose when God let river go. 2 mons: one in river, one at camp; but one purpose for both: to com God's great power, providence as people passed into Promised Land. **Vs. 7b.** Mem stones.
- What kind mem stones we have today? What kind signs do we treasure because remind us of imp people, events. If married, this ring is mem stone; wedding imp. If graduate, diploma hanging on wall is mem stone; education imp. If have family portrait hanging in home, mem stone; family imp. If pics of kids in wallet, mem stones; children imp. If given gift or cert recognizing years of service or achievement accomplished, mem stone; work imp. What kind of mem stones you have/treasure?
- What kind of mem stones does Church treasure? Under renov, but picture front of our sanctuary. Cross on front wall; mem stone; when Jesus shed blood, gave life on cross at Calvary to cancel our guilt, win for us eternal life – imp. Beneath, altar; mem stone; when Jesus comes to us in Sacr HC

with body, blood given, shed for us to assure us, seal for us his forgiveness of our sins – imp. Next to altar, bap font; mem stone; when HS carved name of Triune God onto our souls, adopted us into the family, inheritance of heavenly Father – imp. Up front also is pulpit, symbol of word of God; mem stone; when God’s Gospel is proclaimed with crystal clarity in purity/truth and God’s people strengthened in faith in Savior God – imp. And even when we gather tog as cong for worship on weekly basis (since Jesus rose from dead on first day week); mem stone; when Jesus came back to life on Easter, burst from tomb, he paved way for us someday to burst from our tombs in our res on Last day – imp. Church treasures its mem stones, because nothing more imp to us than our Savior, and our faith in him.

- And so to com/remember what God has done for us, we erect mem stones. What Israelites did. And used them to teach their children; vs. 21-23. And we will teach our children, too, so that know; tell our children what Jesus has done for us, how much loves us; show our children God’s faithfulness, so that they never forget. That’s what mem stones are for: remind, teach, glorify God. Vs. 24.
- You know, in lesson, vs. 9b. Not anymore. Mon at Gilgal; one in river – both gone. Great empires of world have erected statues, mons to com their achievements; archeologists still digging them up. Mem stones don’t last forever. Tombstones crumble away, monuments fall. You might lose wedding ring, or family pictures. Someday our beautiful sanctuary we’re refurbishing will be torn down, our alter/font thrown away. Mem stones don’t last forever. But that’s okay. Really, not mem stones that are imp, but people/events they commemorate. In Scripture, God has recorded for us most imp story of all time, about most imp person of all time – JC our Savior. And he has engraved message of Christ onto hearts by faith. So when we hold onto Scripture, when we remember Jesus by faith, tell children what Jesus has done for us, then the mem stones will have served their purpose. Mem stones don’t last forever; grass withers, flowers fall; **“but the word of our God endures forever” (Is 40:8).**

Joshua 4:1-24 (Christian Standard Bible)

After the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD spoke to Joshua: ²“Choose twelve men from the people, one man for each tribe, ³and command them: Take twelve stones from this place in the middle of the Jordan where the priests are standing, carry them with you, and set them down at the place where you spend the night.”

⁴So Joshua summoned the twelve men he had selected from the Israelites, one man for each tribe, ⁵and said to them, “Go across to the ark of the LORD your God in the middle of the Jordan. Each of you lift a stone onto his shoulder, one for each of the Israelite tribes, ⁶so that this will be a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ ⁷you should tell them, ‘The water of the Jordan was cut off in front of the ark of the LORD’s covenant. When it crossed the Jordan, the Jordan’s water was cut off.’ Therefore these stones will always be a memorial for the Israelites.”

⁸The Israelites did just as Joshua had commanded them. The twelve men took stones from the middle of the Jordan, one for each of the Israelite tribes, just as the LORD had told Joshua. They carried them to the camp and set them down there.

⁹Joshua also set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing. The stones are still there today.

¹⁰The priests carrying the ark continued standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything was completed that the LORD had commanded Joshua to tell the people, in keeping with all that Moses had commanded Joshua. The people hurried across, ¹¹and after everyone had finished crossing, the priests with the ark of the LORD crossed in the sight of the people. ¹²The Reubenites, Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh went in battle formation in front of the Israelites, as Moses had instructed them. ¹³About forty thousand equipped for war crossed to the plains of Jericho in the LORD’s presence.

¹⁴On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they revered him throughout his life, as they had revered Moses. ¹⁵The LORD told Joshua, ¹⁶“Command the priests who carry the ark of the testimony to come up from the Jordan.”

¹⁷So Joshua commanded the priests, “Come up from the Jordan.” ¹⁸When the priests carrying the ark of the LORD’s covenant came up from the middle of the Jordan, and their feet stepped out on solid ground, the water of the Jordan resumed its course, flowing over all the banks as before.

¹⁹The people came up from the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and camped at Gilgal on the eastern limits of Jericho. ²⁰Then Joshua set up in Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken from the Jordan, ²¹and he said to the Israelites, “In the future, when your children ask their fathers, ‘What is the meaning of these stones?’ ²²you should tell your children, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ ²³For the LORD your God dried up the water of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, just as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up before us until we had crossed over. ²⁴This is so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD’s hand is mighty, and so that you may always fear the LORD your God.”

ⁱThe reason I chose to use the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) rather than the New International Version (NIV) for this sermon lesson is that the NIV adds an interpretive spin to vs. 9 that leaves ambiguous whether there actually were two monuments. The Hebrew text clearly speaks of two monuments, so I thought that here the CSB translates more accurately than the NIV. Overall, both are still excellent translations.