

Unit I: From Nomadic Tribes to Settled People

Family Legacies

DEVOTIONAL READING: Luke 8:35-39

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Joshua 4

PRINT PASSAGE: Joshua 4:14-24

Key Verses

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)

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“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)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Adhere to the instruction to remember God’s saving actions.
- Recognize memorials and rituals established to commemorate God’s goodness.
- Fully understand God’s steadfast love for us.

*Key Terms

Camped (verse 19)—Hebrew: *chânâh* (khawnaw’): pitched tents, dwelled, rested; “encamped” (KJV).

Command (verse 16)—Hebrew: *tsâvâh* (tsawvaw’): to charge, appoint, ordain, give charge over, set in order.

Covenant (verse 18)—Hebrew: *berîyth* (bereeth’): a treaty, alliance, league, ordinance, pledge. God’s covenant with the Israelites included making Israel God’s treasured possession.

Stones (verse 20)—Hebrew: *’eben* (eh’-ben): weights; sacred objects (as memorials); plummets. Twelve stones were taken from the Jordan to be used as a reminder to the Israelites of how they crossed the river on dry land.

Waters (verse 18)—Hebrew: *mayim* (mah’-yim): watercourses; streams of water.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Life Happens

Danielle is a community organizer who grew up hearing powerful stories from her grandfather about marching for civil rights and her mother’s fight to integrate schools in their town. These stories shaped her identity and filled her with pride in her family’s resilience. Social justice was not just something to discuss



Overview

Traditions and rituals are used to create meaning and belonging, strengthen community bonds and foster connection across generations. They are used to pass down cherished histories and establish cultural identity. For example, in the African American religious experience, Watch Night Service is a New Year's Eve tradition that commemorates Freedom's Eve when enslaved people awaited news of the Emancipation Proclamation. Today, Black churches around the country and across denominations gather on the eve of a new year to worship, share testimonies of faith, and celebrate God's goodness in community. In this chapter, Joshua is using ritual to provide the Israelite people with a foundational understanding of their cultural identity and to provide a way to remember God's faithfulness to them from the very beginning. From losing the shackles of slavery and safely crossing the Red Sea on dry land to providing manna in the wilderness and granting a new generation access to the Promised Land, Joshua tells the story of God's steadfast love for His people through ritual so that future generations will have a sense of who they are and whose they are.

during Black History Month, but it was a part of her DNA and family legacy. Their experiences weren't just memories—they were a living inheritance.

Recently, Danielle's younger cousin came home from school upset. Their history textbook barely mentioned slavery, skipped over Reconstruction, and summarized the civil rights movement in a single paragraph. There was no discussion at all about the "hidden figures" who undeniably impacted the history of this country and, in many cases, the world. When Danielle raised concerns at a school board meeting, she was told, "We don't want to dwell on the past." The dismissal stung! It felt like watching her family's sacrifices being quietly erased.

At the same time, Danielle's job offered her the chance to lead a new diversity initiative, but only if she agreed to keep it "neutral" and avoid "controversial" topics like systemic racism, sexism or colorism. The offer was tempting: more money, more influence, more visibility, more stability. Yet the conditions felt like a muzzle. She wondered if accepting would mean abandoning the truth.

Danielle realized that if her family doesn't actively protect and pass down their own history, it could be rewritten by others. She was standing at a crossroad: silence for comfort, or courage for legacy. She knew that choosing courage may cost her, but losing her voice would cost far more.

Questions

1. What happens to a community when its history is erased or rewritten by outsiders?
2. How do you balance telling hard truths about the past with building hope for the future?
3. What responsibility do you have to preserve family and cultural legacies?
4. What responsibility does the church have to preserve, protect and teach family, cultural and spiritual legacies to all generations?

COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

God Confirms Joshua's Leadership (*Joshua 4:14-18*)

KJV

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.

NIV

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.

Up to this point, God had spoken to Joshua privately. He gave him the commission, the instructions, the promise. But in verse 14, God takes it public. On that day, the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and the people revered him just as they had revered Moses all the days of his life. Joshua had not campaigned for this. He had not given a speech or lobbied for the people's trust. God lifted him up in front of the entire nation, and the people responded with the same kind of reverence they once had for Moses.

Then comes the moment at the river. God tells Joshua to command the priests carrying the ark of the covenant to come up out of the Jordan. Joshua gives the word, the priests step onto dry ground, and the waters come rushing back to flood stage as if nothing had happened. The entire nation stood there and watched it. One moment the riverbed was dry. The next, the Jordan was flowing again at full force. There was no natural explanation for what they had just seen.

For most of the people standing on that bank, the story of the Red Sea was something they had grown up hearing about. Their parents and grandparents had told it around fires, passed it down through songs and memories. But this was different. This was their own crossing; their own story being written in real time. The God who rescued the generation before them was doing the same thing right in front of their eyes.

 **What Do You Think?** Is there a time in your life where God made a way out of no way?

Stones That Tell a Story (Joshua 4:19-22)

KJV

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.

NIV

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.’

The people came up from the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month and set up camp at Gilgal, on the eastern border of Jericho. Joshua took twelve stones pulled from the middle of the Jordan, one for each tribe of Israel, and set them up right there at the campsite. They were ordinary stones from a riverbed, but Joshua gave them a purpose that would outlast everyone standing there that day.

He told the people, “In the future when your descendants ask their parents, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’” The memorial was built for children who had not been born yet. Joshua was thinking ahead, past the battle plans and the logistics of settlement, to the question that would inevitably come when a child looked at a pile of rocks and asked why they were there. That question would open a door to a conversation about who God is and what He had done.

Faith has always moved from one generation to the next through storytelling. It travels through testimonies shared at the dinner table, through traditions that families and churches hold on to year after year, through sacred objects that carry meaning because someone took the time to explain them. Joshua understood that if no one told the story, the story would eventually be forgotten. The stones at Gilgal were a way to remember.

 **What Do You Think?** Look around your room or home. Are there objects in your possession that help remind you of God’s love for you?

A Witness for Every Generation (Joshua 4:23-24)

KJV

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.

NIV

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.”

In these closing verses, Joshua pulls the Red Sea and the Jordan together into one narrative. He tells the people, “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.” His choice of words is intentional. He says “you” when he talks about the Jordan and “us” when he talks about the Red Sea. He is placing himself inside both stories and reminding the people that what God did decades ago and what God did that morning belong to the same unfolding promise.

Verse 24 widens the lens even further. Joshua says God 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.” The stones at Gilgal carried a message beyond Israel. God’s faithfulness was never meant to stay between Him and His people. It was meant to be seen, talked about, and remembered by anyone paying attention.

The word “fear” here points to reverent awareness—the kind a person develops after watching God do something no human effort could explain. For anyone trying to find steady ground in a world that keeps shifting, this passage offers something solid. The God who held back rivers for His people is still at work, and remembering what He has already done is one of the surest ways to build trust for whatever comes next.

 **What Do You Think?** What stories of God’s faithfulness have been passed down in your family or your faith community? How have those stories shaped the way you trust God today?

Your Life

Young adults often juggle dreams, expectations, disappointments, and hopes. Looking back over the years and being able to identify God’s faithfulness can fortify our faith. Consider what rituals or memorials you could create to mark a significant time in your life when you experienced God’s steadfast love.

Your World!

The words “do this in remembrance of Me,” the instructions given by Jesus during the Last Supper can be found etched in the center of the communion table in worship spaces across the world. Take a look around your sanctuary and consider what other symbols or rituals are practiced.

 Closing Prayer

Dear God, our Way Maker, let us never forget the experience of Your grace and saving power. Help us to remember how Your steadfast love has guided and protected us from generation to generation. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Home Daily Bible Readings		
MONDAY, September 14	“Live as God’s Treasured Possession”	(Deuteronomy 7:1-11)
TUESDAY, September 15	“God Will Love, Bless, and Multiply”	(Deuteronomy 7:12-26)
WEDNESDAY, September 16	“Strengthened in Every Circumstance”	(Philippians 4:10-19)
THURSDAY, September 17	“Armed for Spiritual Warfare”	(2 Corinthians 10:1-5, 15-18)
FRIDAY, September 18	“Christ Has Conquered the World”	(John 16:23-33)
SATURDAY, September 19	“God Fights for God’s People”	(Joshua 10:40–11:5)
SUNDAY, September 20	“God Brings Victory”	(Joshua 11:6-9, 16-23)