

PLEASANT SPRINGS CHURCH • SERMON

The Stones of Remembrance

Crossing the Jordan, the Ark of the Covenant, and the memorials God builds for the next generation

The Stones of Remembrance

A Sermon on Joshua 3 — Crossing the Jordan

By Bro. Jeremy Arnold · Pleasant Springs Church · June 28, 2026

Key Texts: Joshua 3:10–13 • Joshua 4 • 1 Peter 2 • Hebrews 12:1–2

We have gone through the plagues of Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the long journey through the wilderness — all the while being guided and provided for by God. Now Israel stands at the border of the Promised Land, separated by an overflowing Jordan River. This sermon walks through that crossing, the memorial stones God told Israel to set up at Gilgal, and the One those stones were always pointing toward.

THE BIG IDEA

God did not merely want to get Israel across a river — He wanted every generation after them to remember His mighty acts. The stones at Gilgal still testify that God was faithful to Israel. But today there is an even greater testimony: an empty tomb outside Jerusalem that forever proclaims, “He is not here, for He is risen.”

RECAP — STANDING AT THE RIVER

This generation was born in the wilderness. Their forefathers had died there because of unbelief, and now the younger generation stands at the brink of the Jordan, ready to cross over into the Promised Land. If we read on into chapter 4, we will see God command them to take stones out of the riverbed as memorials for future generations.

THE SERMON TEXT — JOSHUA 3:10–13

Joshua 3:10–13 (KJV)

“And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap.”

Before we move on, several things are worth pointing out here.

BEFORE WE MOVE ON – EIGHT OBSERVATIONS

1. Moses is dead, and Joshua is now Israel's covenant leader and God's appointed spokesman.

2. Joshua announces Yahweh as the Lord of all the earth.

3. God is moving forward the covenant He made with Abraham.

4. God is present with them.

5. God goes before them.

6. There will be opposition.

7. The Israelites are about to cross into enemy territory.

8. God is re-claiming territory from hostile powers.

THE ARK — GOD GOES BEFORE HIS PEOPLE

Here we see that the God who was with His people in the wilderness is the same God who goes before them into enemy territory. His presence did not end at the Jordan — it led them through it.

The Ark represented God's throne on earth — the place of His covenant presence among His people. Once again we see God's desire to dwell with His people. Joshua tells the priests to take the Ark, step into the overflowing Jordan, and stand in the midst of the river while all Israel crosses over. As the Ark goes before Israel into the Jordan, God Himself goes before His people.

The Point.

The waters did not part until the priests bearing the Ark stepped into the water. We are called to trust and obey — sometimes God asks us to obey *before* we see Him act. The picture is clear: God goes before His people, not only leading but confronting the opposition head-on Himself.

A MAN FROM EACH TRIBE — LIVING STONES

Then a man from each tribe was to take a stone from the middle of the river, where the priests stood, and stack them on the other side where they camped at the crossing site.

Just as the Israelites were to be God's representatives, Peter calls believers "living stones" (1 Peter 2). While Joshua's stones testified to what God had done, our lives are to testify to what Christ has done.

STONES OF REMEMBRANCE — FOR THE CHILDREN

The memorial stones were designed so that future generations would ask, “What do these stones mean?” Notice that God didn’t tell them to build a monument for themselves — He told them to build one for their children. **Faith is always one generation away from being forgotten.** When asked, every generation would then hear about God’s faithfulness. God wasn’t merely interested in getting Israel across the river; He wanted every generation after them to remember His mighty acts.

What stones of remembrance are we leaving behind?

Just as people passing by would ask what these stones meant, we too erect monuments in recognition of loved ones who have passed, of historical events, of famous people and major events — statues, plaques, pictures, paintings, even songs and poems. But no matter the memorial, probably the most influential is a **testimony.**

A couple of people I would like to draw our attention to now are Joshua and Yahweh. Joshua’s Hebrew name (*Yehoshua*, or the shortened *Yeshua*) is the very name from which we get the name **Jesus**. Both mean, “Yahweh saves.”

THE SPIES — JOSHUA AND CALEB

When Moses sent the ten spies to spy out the Promised Land, they came back with an evil report — that there were giants in the land and that they themselves looked like grasshoppers by comparison. That was everyone except Joshua and Caleb. Joshua and Caleb calmed the people, saying that God was able to deliver them and that they could go in and possess the land.

TESTIMONIES — JOSHUA AND THE GREATER JOSHUA

Joshua leads the people through the Jordan — **Jesus** leads His people through death into eternal life.

Joshua brings people into an earthly inheritance — **Jesus** brings people into a heavenly inheritance.

Joshua defeated earthly enemies — **Jesus** defeated sin, death, Satan, and all the rebellious powers of the unseen realm.

Joshua erected stones as a testimony — **Jesus** left an empty tomb as an eternal testimony.

Just as Israel followed the Ark into the waters of the Jordan, believers follow Christ.

REFLECTION

Who in your life has been a living stone or a faithful testimony?

In closing, I would like to put us in remembrance of Hebrews 12:1–2.

Hebrews 12:1–2 (KJV)

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

The focus isn't the Promised Land — it is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The stones at Gilgal still testify that God was faithful to Israel. But today there is an even greater testimony: there is an empty tomb. Joshua's stones declared that Israel crossed a river; the empty tomb declares that Christ conquered death. Joshua led God's people into an earthly inheritance; Jesus is leading His people into an eternal inheritance.

SO WHAT?

So the greatest Stone of Remembrance is not standing beside the Jordan River. It is an empty tomb outside Jerusalem that forever proclaims, “He is not here, for He is risen.” The question the memorial stones ask of every generation is finally answered at the cross and the empty grave — and our lives, as living stones, are meant to keep telling it.

AFTER THE SERMON — AUTHOR & AUDIENCE

To read the book of Joshua well, it helps to know who first received it and the moment it describes. The following background is offered for deeper study — the same Author-and-Audience approach we use across the Discipleship School, with the Septuagint (LXX) and ESV set beside the preached text.

THE AUTHOR — JOSHUA SON OF NUN

The book takes its name from **Joshua son of Nun**, the Ephraimite who served as Moses' assistant from the days of the Exodus and was commissioned as his successor (Numbers 27:18–23; Deuteronomy 34:9). Jewish tradition (the Talmud, *Bava Batra* 14b–15a) credits Joshua with writing the book, with the account of his death added by the high priest Eleazar and Phinehas. The narrative itself notes that “Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God” (Joshua 24:26), and several passages read as eyewitness testimony.

His Hebrew name **Yehoshua** — shortened to **Yeshua** after the exile — means “Yahweh saves,” and it is the very name rendered *Iesous* in Greek, from which we get **Jesus**. The man who carries Israel across the Jordan and into their inheritance bears, by name, the gospel he points toward.

A name that preaches.

Joshua and Jesus are the same name in two languages. When Matthew says they shall call his name Jesus “for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21), he is unfolding the meaning Israel already heard every time someone called for Joshua at the Jordan.

The first hearers of this story were the **second generation of Israel** — the children of the Exodus, born and raised in the wilderness, whose parents had perished there because of unbelief (Numbers 14:26–35). They had not seen the Red Sea part; they had only heard about it. Now, around **1406 B.C.**, they stand on the east bank of a flooded Jordan (Joshua 3:15 notes it was harvest season, when the river overflows its banks), about to receive their own crossing — their own story to tell their children.

The book is addressed to a people facing three things at once:

A new leader — Moses is gone, and they must learn to trust that the God of Moses is now with Joshua (Joshua 1:5; 3:7).

A real enemy — fortified cities and the nations of Canaan stand between them and the promise.

A long memory to keep — the stones at Gilgal exist so that “when your children ask” (Joshua 4:6, 21), the testimony of God’s faithfulness is handed on, not lost.

Joshua 3:10–11 (LXX & ESV) — The Living God Crosses First

¹⁰... ἐν τούτῳ γνώσεσθε ὅτι θεὸς ζῶν ἐν ὑμῖν ... ¹¹ἰδοὺ ἡ κιβωτὸς διαθήκης κυρίου πάσης τῆς γῆς διαβαίνει τὸν Ἰορδάνην.

¹⁰“Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites... ¹¹Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan.”

LXX phrases: theos zōn en hymin — “a living God among you” (3:10); kibōtos diathēkēs kyriou pasēs tēs gēs — “the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth” (3:11). The preached text above follows the KJV as delivered; the Greek and ESV are set alongside for study.

CONTINUE GROWING IN DISCIPLESHIP

The threads in this sermon — God’s presence going before His people, the driving out of hostile powers, living stones and testimony, and the empty tomb — each open into a fuller study in the Discipleship School. Keep growing:

COSMIC GEOGRAPHY

Paul & the Deuteronomy 32 Worldview

“God is re-claiming territory from hostile powers” — the unseen-realm backdrop to Israel’s conquest and the cross.

PRESENCE & PRIESTHOOD

Malachi to Revelation

Mediation, Presence, and the True Priesthood — following the Ark and the dwelling of God from the Old Testament to the Lamb on the throne.

LIVING STONES

Rooted in Christ

The Seed, the Blood, and the Fruit — what it means for our lives to testify, as “living stones,” to what Christ has done.

THE EMPTY TOMB

The Historical Jesus

A six-week Faith & Reason series on the resurrection — the greatest Stone of Remembrance, examined as history.

“He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

Matthew 28:6 (KJV)

