

Message Series: The Whole Counsel of God, Message 8  
Memory Stones for God's People. Book of Joshua  
Pastor Roger Ridley, Gretna Baptist Church – February 25, 2007

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I have in my possession several stones that remind me of special occasions in my life: a field diamond, which reminds me of the early days of my youth growing up in Tennessee; a fossil brachiopod, reminding me of many afternoons spent looking for fossils along the Illinois River; a Lake Superior Agate, which recalls weekends traveling with my dad in search of them; and an Oreodont tooth, reminding me of the many trips my son and I made to northwest Nebraska fossil hunting. Just to see or hold one of these provides vivid memories I don't want to forget.

In the book of Joshua we find something very similar, on numerous occasions stones are referred to which were meant to help God's people remember significant lessons attached to key events in their life. As we give consideration to this book I want to bring five of them to your attention.

### **I. Miracle Stones**

The first, I am calling Miracle Stones, and they are dealt with in the first five chapters of the book. To introduce them I want you to look at 4:1-7...

It has been forty years since the children of Israel left Egypt. Moses, Aaron, and all the fathers and mothers that first left have since died. It is their children who grew up in the wilderness that are now camped on the eastside of the Jordan with a new leader, Joshua. They are preparing to do what their fathers were unwilling to do, take possession of God's promise. But first, they had to cross the Jordan River, and it was the worst time of year to do so. It was flood season and the river was over its banks. To cross over with so many people and all their belongings was going to be quite a challenge. But God had something special in mind if they would just step forward by faith.

God gave the instructions to Joshua and he then relayed them to the people. As their new leader it was extremely important that he could demonstrate His faith and confidence in God. The priests were to take the Ark of the Covenant, as instructed in the Law, and step forward. Would they be swept away by the flooded waters? No, their feet never got wet. God caused the water to stop up ahead of them so that they were able to cross on dry ground.

This was every bit the miracle God had done for their fathers at the Red Sea. Imagine hearing about it all their lives but now experiencing it for themselves!

All Israel and their belongings crossed the Jordan on dry ground. Once they were on the other side, God instructed Joshua to send a representative from each tribe back to the middle of the river bed and take a stone big enough that it would need to be carried on their shoulder. These were to be taken with them to where they set up camp. Joshua then took the stones and stacked them up as a memorial. That pile of stones was to remind the people of the miracle God did for them.

But of all the people, it was especially meant for the children, so that years later when their children would see the pile of stones and ask what it was for, their father could tell them the story of God's miracle. And the implication is that this would take place from generation to generation. Children would see the stones, ask what they were for, and hear the story. We are still hearing and retelling the story today. It is the story of what God is willing to do in the life of His people when they will simply take Him at His Word and step forward by faith.

What a different story they had for their children than their fathers had for them. Their fathers died in the wilderness due to unbelief, but these would leave their children a memory of faith.

What kind of memory will you and I leave behind for our children and their children?

## **II. Warning Stones**

The next heap of stones in the book of Joshua would appropriately be considered Warning Stones. See 7:24-26...

The lesson of these stones starts in chapter six with one of the best known Bible stories of all time, The Walls of Jericho. You have heard it, right?

Each day for six days the army of Israel was to march once around the walls of Jericho, follow by seven priests blowing trumpets, and the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant. On the seventh day they were to march the same way only seven times and then give out a shout and God promised the walls

would come down giving them a great victory. However, there was one word of warning. See 6:18, 19, 24...

The first fruits or spoils of this first victory in the Land of Promise were to go entirely to God.

Well, as promised, God gave the children a tremendous victory and seemingly everything was great. Just a short distance from Jericho was the next town on their list. It was a smaller town by the name of Ai. They spied it out and concluded that instead of using the entire army they would only need 2000 to 3000 men to give them victory. They were full of self-confidence and did not even check with God for wisdom.

As they went against Ai, 7:5 informs us that their hearts melted as water, they fled the battle, and 36 Israelites died. Joshua fell to the ground and cried out to God, “*WHY?*”

God told him to get up off his face because there was sin in the camp, and after following God’s instructions it was discovered that a young family man by the name of Achan was the source of the problem. Verse 21 provides his confession...

Verse 11 provides God’s accusation...

Achan took from God and called it his own. For punishment, Achan, his family (because they had participated with him in his sin), and everything he owned was taken outside the camp, they were stoned to death, with all of Israel participating so they would be impressed with the seriousness of sin, burned, and a great heap of stones were piled on them as a witness and warning. The message of the heap of stones: sin brings death.

Numbers 32:23 says when we sin against the Lord, “*be sure your sin will find you out.*” Achan sought to hide his sin, but the Lord knew all along, and it wasn’t long before everyone else did as well. The New Testament teaches the same message. See Galatians 6:7-8...

We all know someone whose life has been ruined because of sin. Let’s learn from this heap of Warning Stones raised over the bones of Achan, so that the same will not happen to us.

### **III. Plastered Stones**

In chapter eight we come across some significant stones that I am referring to as Plastered Stones. See 8:30-35...

Maybe you are wondering why I am referring to these as Plastered Stones. See Deuteronomy 27:2-4...

After experiencing victory in their second battle with Ai, the children of Israel traveled to Mounts Ebal and Gerizim. There they built two altars. The first was for sacrifice as they confessed their sins and offered thanks to God. The second was a tall wall of stones, which was plastered over. On those plastered stones the Word of God given to Moses was written. Then with half the people on Mount Ebal and half the people on Mount Gerizim, Joshua read the words of God with the echoing sound of “*Amen*” as the people affirmed the Word of God.

This wall of plastered stones, which would be there for years to come, was to be a witness both to the people of Israel and the people of Canaan that this was the standard of their life: the Word of God.

Recently there was a movement to get the Ten Commandments posted in the schools of our land. Although well intentioned, what we need today is not the Word of God on the walls of our schools, but in the hearts of our people, in your heart and in my heart.

When God’s Word is our standard, then God’s blessing will be our experience. The people of Israel certainly found that to be true. Leaving there, with God’s Word as their standard, chapters 9-12 describe them in conflict with a total of thirty-one kings, and they experienced victory against everyone.

Joshua 1:8 provides a promise I believe continues to hold true for us today...

### **IV. Lottery Stones**

Between chapters thirteen and twenty-one we have the division of the Land of Promise among the tribes of Israel and involved with this are a set of stones which have a very significant role. See 14:1-5...

What does it mean that they divided the land by lot? Most agree they used some kind of marked stones that were cast out, either on the ground or in the lap, so Lottery Stones would seem an appropriate name. That kind of leaves the impression of chance doesn't it? Like the throwing of dice, and that is exactly how it is used in Matthew 27:35 when the soldiers gambled at the foot of the Cross for the garment of Christ. They used the death of Christ as an opportunity for a game of chance. But in every other place in Scripture, nearly seventy times, where the casting of lots is used, it is not left to chance; instead the outcome was left up to God. No verse makes this clearer than Proverbs 16:33...

When, according to God's will, Israel made use of the casting of lots, the outcome was God's will. The choice was His alone.

In chapter thirteen and following Joshua divided the land, but it was God who determined how it would be divided. God decided what the people of Israel got.

It is interesting to me that the casting of lots was used in the Bible all the way up to the first chapter of Acts, where the Apostles chose an Apostle to replace Judas through the casting of lots (Acts 1:26). But in the second chapter of Acts, with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the casting of lots was no longer used. Instead of using lots to determine God's will, as God's people today we are to be yielded and directed by the Holy Spirit.

There is a word used of us however that I especially find interesting in connection with this. See Ephesians 1:11...

The phrase, "*being predestined*" literally means "*our lot has been cast out.*" For those of us who know the Lord as our Savior, in Him God has already determined our lot in life. My lot has been established, your lot has been established, and now it is up to us to lay hold of all that has been given to us.

## **V. Hearing Stone**

There is one more stone in the book of Joshua that is covered in the final two chapters of the book; I am calling it a Hearing Stone. See 24:26-27...

Chapters twenty-three and twenty-four contain the final words of Joshua to the leaders and all the people of Israel before his death. The words were not his but what God had given him to say. It was a message telling them how to stay in the Land of Promise and how to keep enjoying the blessings of God.

23:6, keep obeying

23:7, keep separated

23:8, keep cleaving (depending entirely on)

23:11, keep loving with all your heart and soul

24:1-13, keep remembering all that God has done for you

24:14 keep serving

And then in verse fifteen he gives the climatic challenge, *“Choose you this day whom ye will serve... as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*

They all made a promise that day to serve God completely. When Joshua set up the stone against the oak tree, he knew he wouldn't be around much longer to remind them but that stone would be there for years to come as a witness to their promise. Every word they said, the stone heard, and every time they saw the stone it would cause them to remember what they promised. God wants us to reach a point in our life when we stop fooling around with Him and the world, when we decide once and for all that we are going to serve Him. See Romans 12:1-2...

I don't have a hearing stone that serves as a witness of that day in my life but I did write a full description of the occasion down in the Bible I was using at the time and it still serves as a witness of the decision I made as a young Christian many years ago to serve the Lord fully in my life.

What about you? Have you reached that point in your relationship with God where you have been willing to say, *“The world behind me, the Lord before me, no turning back!”*?

What we have seen in the book of Joshua are some memory stones that served as a witness to some important decisions the people of Israel made in their walk with God. We don't need the stones but we do need to remember what God has done in our life, what He has taught us, and the decisions we have made to serve Him that we might move forward in our walk with Him and not backward.