

What Mean These Stones?

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“And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch [set up] in Gilgal. 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? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. 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: 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.” (Josh. 4:20–24)

Israel’s crossing the Jordan River was a memorable event in the nation’s history. It marked another chapter in the fulfillment of God’s promise to give the land to Abraham’s descendants (Gen. 12:6-7; 17:8; 26:3; et al), and the circumstances surrounding their crossing (Josh. 3:14-17) served as a declaration to the Canaanites that the people of God had arrived (Josh. 2:1-11). The crossing of the Jordan River has also been an inspiration to songwriters. How familiar are the words: “On Jordan’s stormy banks I stand, and cast a wishful eye; To Canaan’s fair and happy land, where my possessions lie” (Samuel Stennett, 1787).

So grand and meaningful was that day, that Joshua ordered twelve stones be set up, both as a memorial of the event itself and to serve as a means to teach future generations of God’s power and faithfulness. Much like our Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C., the memorial would cause children to ask, “What mean these stones?” and provide an opportunity for their fathers to instruct them in the ways of God.

There are other occasions in Israel’s history where we find special emphasis placed on teaching children about God (Exod. 12:26; Deut. 6:7, 20; Psalm 78:3-6; Isa. 38:19), and we ourselves have received an admonition from the inspired apostle to do the same (Eph. 6:4). As a people of God, are we taking heed to this grand admonition to teach our children of the God of heaven? Are we seizing every opportunity to cause them to remember the faithfulness of God and the sacrifices of the Savior? Better still, are we “setting up stones” that will create opportunities for us to build up a faith in our children so that they might fear the Lord God forever?

Can our children ask, “What mean these stones” when we fail faithfully to insure they are regularly given opportunities to hear about the spiritual matters? Do we bring them to Bible classes, worship services, and involve them in youth activities? And what about gospel meetings—not only ours but those of sound congregations in the area? Remember when families travelled to attend gospel meetings? Today, families spend more time on the ball field, basketball court, or vacation than feeding on the Word of God.

Many curiosities and questions arise in the minds of youth when hearing such inspired accounts as the creation, the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, the global flood, the ten plagues, Israel’s crossing the Red Sea, and the fall of Jericho. What great questions arise in the hearts of our children when they observe their parents partaking of the Lord’s Supper, giving of their means every Lord’s day, or hearing the gospel proclaimed from the pulpit! What golden opportunities are missed when we fail to set up stones by faithfully providing opportunities for our children to hear the Word of God!

Can our children ask, “What mean these stones” if we do not live before them daily the Christian life and make decisions that focus their attention on spiritual matters rather than worldly? Imagine the great opportunities to teach the fear of the Lord when asked such questions as, “Why do we not go to the beach?” or “Why do we always go to a private beach?” “Why am I not allowed to go school dances?” “Why can I not go swimming when both girls and boys are present?” “Why do you not drink alcohol like Johnnie’s parents?” “Why do we attend worship services even when we are on vacation?” “Why do we not watch that television program, everyone else does?” “Why do I have to miss ball practices/games

when it is scheduled on Wednesday night?” How can our children ask, “What mean these stones?” if we fail to set up memorial stones of faithfulness to God in our own lives?

And IF our children ask, “What mean these stones,” will we be able to give a Bible answer to establish them in the faith of God’s Word? The Hebrews writer rebuked his readers saying, “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God” (Heb. 5:12). We ought rather to be as Abraham, of whom the Lord said, “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord” (Gen. 18:19). How can we bring our children up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” if we ourselves are destitute of Bible knowledge and lacking in spiritual understanding?

“What mean these stones?” Brethren, let us purpose in our hearts and prepare ourselves to be able soundly to teach our children, to live a life before them that is characterized by godliness, and to provide for them opportunities to study and to learn about their Creator. Let us set up, not stones of stumbling, but rather memorial stones that will direct their hearts and minds to their Savior and King.