

I don't know about you, but a heap of stones does not scream “lasting memorial” to me. Particularly the twelve stones that Joshua stacked up in the middle of the Jordan River. What did he think was going to happen to that stack of stones when the water that was temporarily being held back was released and rushed back through this river bed? Did those stones really stay put? And if the stones stayed stacked up under the water, did Joshua think that the next generation of Israelites would be exceptional divers who would jump into the river to look around, then come back to the surface and ask, “What do these stones mean?” I think it was **MUCH MORE LIKELY** that the twelve stones Joshua set up on dry ground in Gilgal would get **ALL** the attention. But there was also no guarantee that the stones on dry ground would stay put. The stones could get knocked down or removed entirely by earthquakes, enemies, land use changes, you name it. And while an individual stone can indeed last a long time – it can also be shattered or worn away. We've all seen headstones in cemeteries that have been broken, or gotten worn down to where you can't read what was engraved on them, so we know that a single memorial stone won't last forever.

And perhaps that's why three Egyptian pharaohs chose to build pyramids with massive stones because they hoped that they would last far longer than a single stone or a stack of stones to mark their graves. Yet even those huge pyramids have had most of their outer casings of smooth, white limestone stripped and stolen away – so their size has been diminished.

And then there are the many “standing stones,” and stone circles, and large cairns found across the United Kingdom that were important burial sites. Perhaps the most well-known of the lot is Stonehenge – and yet even there all the stones do not stand as originally placed, in part because not all the stones are still there, and also because different “restorations” have been done to straighten up some of the stones, and to even lift fallen stones back into position.

The monolithic stone statues on Easter Island were carved to remember and represent some important deceased ancestors or chiefs whose spirits were believed to keep watch over the island.

Clearly the idea of creating a tangible stone memorial has appealed to all sorts of people for thousands of years. Stone memorials still appeal to us today because we like to be able to see and hold onto things, and to have places where we can go to remember people and events that are important to us. So I think Joshua was tapping into a powerful way to connect with people by using the twelve stones to represent the twelve tribes of Israel when he created his stone memorial. . . . But it's funny that today all of us were able to

connect to this memory of how the Lord our God made a way for the Israelites to cross the Jordan River on dry ground to enter the promised land by Gilgal – without having to ask what a certain stack of stones means! We actually didn't have to see ANY stones, because the memorial that has truly lasted through the years was one made of WORDS! Words that were first spoken and remembered, and shared again and again, before being written down. Then the spoken and written words continued to be handed down from generation to generation. Eventually the original words were translated into English words that we can read and hear and understand right here, today.

Joshua's stone memorial becomes "real" to us through the combination of these words that we have received and our own faith in the Lord our God. We don't have to actually *see* Joshua's stack of stones to understand why it was a powerful memorial, because just thinking about how God was at work to not only prepare the way, but to also accompany the Israelites throughout this exodus journey, inspires and awes us. It also prompts us to remember the ways that God has prepared the way and accompanied us on our own journeys in life and in our faith development. Today we specifically remember people God placed in our lives who guided us, loved us, inspired us, challenged us, fed and nurtured us, taught us, befriended us, worked beside us, prayed with us and for us. May we remember well these people who have been gifts from God to us. And may God use us to be a godly gift to others.

Amen.