

Joshua 4:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man,

Analysis

Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man, This command initiates the memorial stone ceremony commemorating Israel's miraculous Jordan crossing. The Hebrew *lekû lâkem* (לְקֻ לְקָמֶ) carries the force of "take for yourselves," emphasizing personal participation and responsibility. The number twelve corresponds to Israel's twelve tribes, ensuring comprehensive tribal representation in this sacred memorial act.

The phrase "out of every tribe a man" (ish echad ish echad leshev, אִישׁ אֶחָד אִישׁ אֶחָד לְשָׁבֵט) uses repetition to stress individual tribal selection—not merely twelve random men but specific representatives of each tribe. This pattern of twelve representatives appears throughout Israel's history (Numbers 1:4, 13:2, Revelation 21:12), symbolizing the unity and completeness of God's covenant people.

This memorial action served multiple purposes:

1. it testified to God's miraculous intervention
2. it created a teaching opportunity for future generations (Joshua 4:6-7),
3. it unified the tribes in acknowledging their shared salvation history.

The number twelve also anticipates Christ's selection of twelve apostles, who would become foundations of the new covenant people of God (Matthew 10:1-4, Ephesians 2:20). Both old and new covenant memorials emphasize representative leadership and collective identity in God's redemptive purposes.

Historical Context

This event occurred around 1406 BC as Israel prepared to enter Canaan after forty years of wilderness wandering. The Jordan River crossing took place during harvest season (Joshua 3:15) when the river flooded its banks, making the miraculous nature of the crossing even more dramatic. The twelve men selected would carry stones from the Jordan riverbed to create a memorial at Gilgal, Israel's first campsite in Canaan.

The memorial stones paralleled Israel's Passover memorial (Exodus 12:26-27) and the law's requirement to teach children God's mighty acts (Deuteronomy 6:20-25). In ancient Near Eastern culture, memorial stones and monuments were common, but Israel's memorials uniquely testified to Yahweh's saving acts rather than human achievements or military conquests.

The selection of twelve tribal representatives emphasized that all Israel participated in God's miracle, not merely those physically present. This inclusivity was crucial because two and a half tribes (Reuben, Gad, half of Manasseh) had already received inheritance east of Jordan (Joshua 1:12-15) yet still participated fully in conquest. The memorial reinforced national unity and shared covenant identity despite geographical separation.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How do physical memorials help preserve and transmit faith to future generations?
2. What is the significance of representative leadership in God's dealings with His people throughout Scripture?

3. How should modern believers create meaningful spiritual memorials to God's faithfulness?
4. What does the emphasis on all twelve tribes' participation teach about unity and inclusiveness in the body of Christ?
5. How do Old Testament memorials (stones, Passover) point forward to New Testament sacraments (baptism, communion)?

Interlinear Text

אִישׁ	אֶנְשׁוֹם	עָשָׂה	רְשָׁעָה	בְּעֵד	מִן	לְכָם	לְקַח	אִישׁ
Take	H0	H4480	out of the people	you twelve	H6240	men	a man	
H3947			H5971		H8147		H582	H376
out of every	a man	out of every	tribe					
H259	H376	H259	H7626					
מִשְׁבָּטִים:								
out of every	a man	out of every	tribe					
H259	H376	H259	H7626					

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 3:12 (Parallel theme): Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man.

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