Crossing the Jordan



Scripture Reference: Joshua 3-4; 5:10-12

Suggested Theme: God is active in the world. Remember what He has done for us.

Memory Verse: “Depend on the Lord and his strength. Always go to him for help. Remember the wonderful things he has done. Remember his miracles and his decisions.” 1 Chronicles 16:11-12, ICB

Story Overview:

After forty years of wandering in the desert, it was time to cross over the Jordan River and take the land that God had promised. Joshua instructed the priests to carry the Ark of the Covenant and begin walking into the Jordan. Even though the river was at flood stage, it immediately stopped flowing so that all of the people could pass safely through. To help the Israelites remember all He had done for them, the Lord had them pile twelve large stones from the middle of the Jordan, one on top of the other, to make a memorial.

Background Study:

As the people of Israel prepared to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land, Joshua commanded them to listen to the words of the Lord because the next morning, God was going to do wonders among them. Forty years earlier, the people had listened to the words of ten spies, so they were not allowed to enter the land (Numbers 13). This time, Joshua does not ask for reports or opinions. He simply leads the people in obeying the Lord’s commands.

God told Joshua that when He helped the people cross the river, Joshua would be exalted in the nation’s sight; the people would know that God was with Joshua just as He had been with Moses. Moses led the people across the Red Sea, and now Joshua led them across the Jordan. It is interesting to note that the name “Joshua” means “Yahweh (God) is salvation.” The Greek name for “Joshua” is “Jesus”, and it means “God rescues”, “God saves”, and “God delivers.”

This crossing was very significant. It was the official entry into the Promised Land. Think how the Jordan River plays a figurative significance in many songs we sing. We often compare crossing the Jordan River with crossing from this life into our future “promised land.”

Joshua directed the people in a procession across the river. It took faith to start across. The river was at flood stage, and the waters did not part until the feet of the priests carrying the ark of the covenant touched the water (Joshua 3:15-16). The Lord did not reveal how they were going to cross. He simply told them to step into the water (now that’s stepping out in faith!). The ark symbolized the presence of the Lord. Having the priests carry the ark in front of the people showed that God was leading them into the new land.

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After the crossing, Joshua continued to obey God's commands. He used twelve stones—gathered by one man from each tribe—from the dry riverbed to build a memorial. The memorial was to remind Israel of what God had done for them (Joshua 4:1-7). There are some textual variations concerning the stones and the monument that was built from them. The NIV speaks of only one monument. It was built at the place where they camped (Gilgal). Some versions mention the Gilgal monument but add that Joshua built a second monument in the middle of the riverbed where the priests stood with the ark (Joshua 4:9). You might see one or both monuments in some picture books or visual aids. Whether there was more than one monument or not, today's story will be concerned with the monument built at the camp where everyone could see it. If there were another monument, it would have been covered with water. The monument in the camp would have been visible to all so that children would see it and ask what it meant (Joshua 4:6-7). Since Gilgal was to be the Israelites' base camp for quite some time, the monument would be seen often.

Although not covered in today's session, we find that unfinished business was taken care of at the Gilgal camp (Joshua 5:1-9). Circumcision seems to have been ignored since leaving Egypt. The Lord was about to lead His covenant people in possessing the land. He wanted them to fulfil the covenant right of circumcision, which marked them as His people.

(Joshua 5:10-12) The people also celebrated Passover. As soon as they began to eat the bountiful food of the land of Canaan, the manna stopped. Now, they were in the land of plenty.

The ark of the covenant, the monument, circumcision, and the Passover were all ways to remember the Lord's power and what He had done for the people. The children in your group can explore ways they can remember the Lord. As we see in today's story, the Lord used visual aids!

Way to Introduce the Story:

Bring a few keepsakes to the gathering today. These could be special gifts that someone has given you or an item that belongs or belonged to formerly belonged to someone special (a book, photo, letter, an old ticket stub, jewellery, toy, etc.) Talk about how you remember that person or the event every time you see the item. Ask the children to share some of the things that help them remember someone. "We have been studying about the Promised Land for many weeks, now. Today we are going to read about the people finally entering the land. It was a very special day that people would remember for a long time. God wanted to make sure they would remember so He had the people build something to remind them. Every time they saw the item they would remember the day. Does anyone want to guess what the item was? (Let them guess) All right, let's listen to the story and see if we can find out."

The Story:

There was only one river to cross, and the Israelites would finally be in the land that God had promised them. Joshua was a good leader, and he knew that God would take care of them. He knew that the new land would be very good. Sometimes, people called the land the land of "milk and honey" because they loved to drink milk and eat honey and because these two foods indicated plenty. They thought that would be a good way to describe the land.

It was harvest time when Joshua told the people that it was time to cross the Jordan River. At harvest time, the Jordan River was always so full of water that it overflowed its banks. The people could look across the river and see the beautiful land of Canaan with its green grass, tall trees, and fields of golden grain. But they could not cross the river because it was too deep and too swift.

The Lord told Joshua His special plan. He told Joshua to gather the priests together and have them carry the ark of the covenant and walk straight into the Jordan River! The people were to follow them. This must have seemed really scary for everyone, but they obeyed God. They remembered how He had always taken care

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of them. He would take care of them today!

The priests picked up the big gold, the ark of the covenant, and started walking toward the water. The water was fast and looked very dangerous, but they just kept walking. Then, an amazing thing happened. As soon as the priest's feet touched the water, the water stopped flowing. The river dried up wherever the priests walked. It was just like when the Red Sea parted for Moses. They took the ark and carried it to the middle of the Jordan River and then stopped. While the priests stood with the ark, all of the people passed through to the other side. They didn't even get wet.

God wanted the people always to remember how He stopped the Jordan River. He told Joshua to choose twelve men (one from each tribe). The men went to the middle of the river, where the priests stood, and gathered one large stone each. The men carried the twelve stones to their camp beside the river and put them into a large pile. The Lord told the people that, from now on, when anyone saw the pile of twelve stones, they would remember the special day that the Lord helped them cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

After everyone was finished crossing the river (the people and the soldiers), the priests came up out of the river. As soon as their feet touched the dry ground on the bank of the river, then, the water all rushed back, and the river began to flow again. The water was just as fast and deep as it had been before.

The Israelites made camp at Gilgal, where they had put their stones. As everyone looked at the stones, they must have thanked God and thought about what He had done for them.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

View this slideshow and download it from the original source: http://freebibleimages.org/illustrations/joshua-jordan/

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- Which river did the Israelites have to cross to enter the Promised Land? (Jordan River)
- What did the Priests carry when they crossed the Jordan River? (The Ark of the Covenant)

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- What happened to the rushing water of the Jordan when the priests stepped into it? (It stopped)
- What did the Israelites pick up from the middle of the Jordan River? (12 stones)
- Why did the Lord tell Joshua to have the men pile the twelve stones together? (So they would see it and remember what the Lord had done for them)
- What did crossing the Jordan River show the Israelites about God?
- What did crossing the Jordan River show the Israelites about Joshua? (God was with Joshua and would work through him like He'd worked through Moses)

Reflection:

- Imagine the Jordan River. Imagine that the river is flooded and moving quickly. What does the river look like? What does it sound like?
- God told the priests to step into the Jordan River even though it was flooded. How do you think the priests felt when they stepped onto the water?
- How would you have felt if you were one of the priests and told to step into the rushing water? Would you have been afraid?
- Do you ever pick up stones or rocks? What kind of rocks do you admire or collect?
- Does this story remind you of another story about the Israelites? Which one and why?
- God had Joshua pick up stones to make a memorial to remember how God had helped the Israelites cross the Jordan River. What has God done for you or your family that you want to remember? How could you remember this?
- What was your favourite part of this story? What part of the story did you find most interesting?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- My God is So Big Song
- Creation Song
- Rise and Shine Song
- Our God is an Awesome God Song
- Hymns such as:
  - I Won't Have to Cross Jordan Alone
  - On Jordan's Stormy Banks, I Stand
  - Swing Low, Sweet Chariot
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Guide young children to use streamers, tape or string to lay down two parallel lines to create a “river.” Children can then re-enact the Israelites crossing the Jordan river.
- Play a simple word game. Bible Wordz Game is an adaptable game in which children form words from letter tiles. The words relate to those in the Bible lesson.



Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Make a relief map of the Promised Land. It should be dry by next week so that you can paint it. Each week, you can add more details as you learn more about the land of Canaan. Instructions on how to make a relief map at https://www.weirdunsocializedhomeschoolers.com/step-by-step-to-making-salt-dough-map/
- Paint today’s memory verse on a flat stone or find 12 stones to glue together to form a monument.
- Make a placemat by writing the memory verse on a large piece of paper and decorating it.
- Cut twelve stone shapes out of sandpaper. Children glue the “stones” on paper to make a remembrance like the Israelites did. *Click here for the pattern.*

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page Crossing the Jordan & puzzle worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page Crossing the Jordan River (Ministry to Children)

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