

A Path through the Jordan River

Joshua 3:7—4:7

Main Idea

We remember how God was with Joshua and the Israelites as they crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land.

Something to Remember

“When your children ask their parents in time to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ then you shall let your children know.”

—Joshua 4:21–22a

Background for Teachers

Joshua took up leadership of the Israelites after Moses died. Joshua and the people are poised at the edge of the Promised Land, with only the Jordan River between them and the realization of God’s long-ago promise of a land. Like the more familiar Exodus 14 story of the previous generation crossing the Red (or Reed) Sea, this one will require God’s intervention to provide a dry path through the water.

The miracle happens when Joshua, at God’s direction, instructs the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant to step into the water. Holding the most sacred relic of the nomadic band of travelers, in which the Ten Commandments were kept, they do so. The waters immediately stand still, and the people cross over on dry ground. Again, at God’s direction, Joshua tells twelve men, one from each of the tribes of Israel, to pick up a rock from the riverbed. They carry these to Gilgal, where they camp for the night.

Piling the rocks into a memorial, Joshua says, “When your children ask their parents in time to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ then you

shall let your children know, ‘Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground.’ For the LORD your God dried up the waters” (Joshua 4:21–23a). Right here is the reason you are spending your time and talent teaching the kids in your care. Joshua points to the crucial place that memory plays in the development of our faith. We teach these old stories, year after year, so that our children can connect God’s presence and faithfulness in the past with the present. This is not just a memorial for the next generation of Israelites in Canaan. It is a memorial for all future generations, including our own. The stones our ancestors have piled up for us help us remember, and also recognize that God is still acting to protect and direct God’s people.

Each story you teach is another rock pile your students can see, experience, touch, and remember. The stories are signs pointing out that God has been this way before. And God is still providing ways through deep water, and a tribe with whom to travel. Be assured that the stories you share with your class are like rocks, slowly building into a visible memorial of God at work in the world. Keep the faith! Are you ready to wade on in?

Joshua 3:7—4:7



You Will Need

Assemble

- Through the Water Background from Session 1
- Marker
- River rock for each child
- Permanent markers or paint pens
- Music player and music (*optional*)

Bible Study

- Bible
- "Left-Right Reading" (Resource 6)
- Name rocks from Assemble

Claim

- "Through the Water Game" (Resource 5)
- Copies of "Comic 3"

- Through the Water Background
- Paper
- Die
- Stickers
- Marker
- Name rocks
- Crayons or colored pencils (*optional*)

Depart

- Name rocks
- Copies of "For the Home 3"

Assemble: God Calls Us Together

Welcome

Take care of any attendance or offering procedures at the beginning of class.

Name Rocks

Have each child choose a river rock and decorate it with his or her name and other designs. Use permanent markers or paint pens for this. Set them aside to dry. The kids will need them in Bible Study and Claim.

Through the Water Background

When all the kids have decorated a rock, invite them to set up the **Through the Water Background**. Ask: What are some ways to get across a river? (*bridge, boat, ferry, swim*)

Invite the kids to show their ideas through charades, and have the other children guess what they are acting out. Speculate about how people in Bible times might have crossed a river. Tell them that a miracle occurs in the story they will hear today, and the people walk across a river on dry ground. Set the backgrounds aside until Claim.

Bible Study: We Hear God's Word

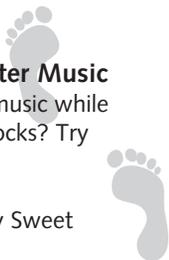
Left-Right Reading

Gather with the name rocks and a Bible. Remind the kids that our stories are about people near mountains or water, and how God was with them. Show where the story is in the Bible as you remind them that we started with Noah (in Genesis), and then learned about Moses (in Exodus). Do they remember what Moses brought down

Rock Me in the Water Music

Want to listen to some music while the kids decorate their rocks? Try these:

- "Wade in the Water" by Sweet Honey in the Rock
- "Down to the River to Pray" by Alison Krauss





from Mount Sinai? (*the Ten Commandments*) Explain that our story mentions Moses and the commandments, and begins shortly after.

Read (slowly!) from **“Left-Right Reading.”** Children will pass the name rocks around the circle to the left and the right as you read. If passing the name rocks gets to be too distracting, try the activity again, using fewer rocks spaced around the circle. Repeat the reading, asking the kids to listen closely for what happens in the story. Talk about the story, using the following questions:

- ? What do you think the people thought when they saw the river in their way?
- ? What do you think the priests thought when Joshua told them to carry the Ark into the river?
- ? Describe what your reaction would have been when the water stopped.
- ? Do you think the rock pile was a good idea? Why?
- ? Role-play a child asking about the rocks and a parent answering.
- ? If you were stacking twelve rocks, what shape would you use?

Claim: We Respond to God’s Word

Through the Water Game

Before class, take a regular die and place stickers over the 4, 5, and 6. On the stickers, write one of the following words: “I,” “You,” and “We.” Make the **Through the Water Background** into a game board for three players by placing paper underneath the path and adding nine spaces. Mark one space as the Ark of the Covenant. All players will use their name rock as a playing piece and will begin on one side of the river. In turn, players answer a question you read from **“Through the Water Game”** then roll the die. If a player rolls a number, he or she moves forward that many spaces. If a player rolls a word, he or she performs an action from **“Through the Water Game”** in the following way: “I” means the child does it alone, “You” means the child chooses another child to do it, and “We” means everyone does it. Landing on the Ark of the Covenant means the child moves forward three spaces. The goal is to get everyone across the river.

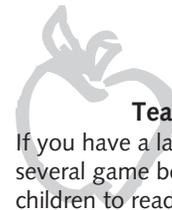
Comic Book

Pass out a copy of **“Comic 3”** to each child. Invite older children to pair up with younger children, and read the page together. If there is time, they may color the pages.

Depart: God Sends Us into the World

What Do These Stones Mean?

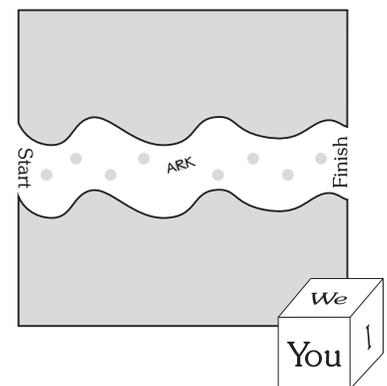
Gather with the name rocks. Can the kids recall what Joshua said about why the stones were set up? “When your children ask their

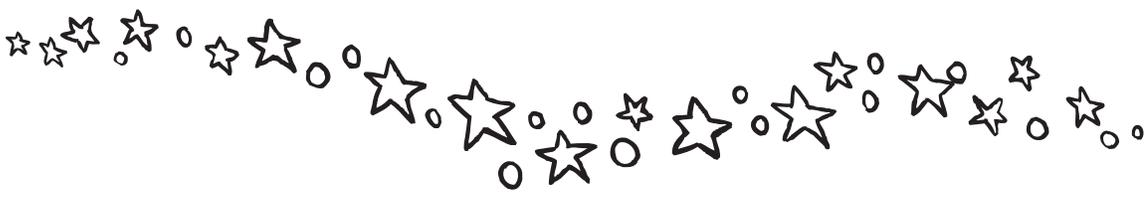


Teaching Tip

If you have a large group, make several game boards. Ask older children to read the questions and actions for their group. If you have a lot of space, make a giant game board on the floor with masking tape, and let the kids play all together as their own game pieces.

Through the Water Game Setup





parents in time to come, 'What do these stones mean?' then you shall let your children know, 'Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground.' For the LORD your God dried up the waters" (Joshua 4:21–23a).

Ask the kids to remember a time that God was with them. They might think about something God has done for them, like giving them a loving family and good friends, or sending us Jesus. As an example, name something God has done for you, and put a rock in the middle of the circle as you name it. Invite the kids to do the same.

Remembering and Sending Out

Teach the kids the following chant and motions.

We went all together, (*Clasp hands with those beside you.*)
Crossing the river. (*Walk, waving arms.*)
The stones help me see (*Point to the stones.*)
The Lord was with me! (*Move into the middle.*)

Ask them to come up with new motions.

Closing Prayer

Mighty God, we thank you that you were with Joshua and the people when they crossed through the Jordan River. Help us remember all the times you have been with us, and trust that you are with us wherever we go. And all God's children said, "Amen!"

Evaluate

How did the kids do when offering a personal experience of God during Depart? Are some more reticent to share? Think about ways to encourage them without singling them out. Always allow children to participate in such exercises silently, if they choose.

Future

Session 4 talks about twists in the story of Deborah. If you have access to a game of "Twister," it could be an option.

Session 6 includes an optional activity, "The Uprooted Game," which is based on the realities faced by refugees. The tabletop version of the game is played with dice or a spinner and comes with playing pieces and instructions. Purchase "The Uprooted Game" for \$3 online at store.pcusa.org.

SEND HOME

- Name rocks
- Copy of "Comic 3"
- Copy of "For the Home 3"

Through the Water Game

Note to Teacher: Set up game board as directed in the session.

Questions

At the beginning of our story, the people of Israel were slaves—where? (*Egypt*)

Who led the people out of Egypt? (*Moses*)

To what land did Moses lead the people of Israel? (*the Promised Land*)

What mountain did Moses come to? (*Mount Sinai*)

What did God give to Moses on Mount Sinai? (*the Ten Commandments*)

What did they put the commandments in? (*the Ark of the Covenant*)

Did they get to the Promised Land quickly or slowly? (*slowly*)

Who was the leader after Moses? (*Joshua*)

What river was on the edge of the Promised Land? (*the Jordan River*)

Who told Joshua how to get across the river? (*God*)

What was carried into the water? (*the Ark of the Covenant*)

Who carried the Ark? (*the priests*)

What happened when the priests' feet touched the water? (*The water stood up!*)

How did the people get across the river? (*They walked.*)

How long did the priests stay in the river? (*until everyone crossed*)

What did they take from the river? (*rocks*)

How many rocks came from the river? (*twelve*)

Where did Joshua take the people next? (*Gilgal*)

Why did they leave the rocks there? (*to remember*)

What book of the Bible is this story in? (*Joshua*)

Is this story in the Old or New Testament? (*Old*)

What books are the commandments in? (*Exodus and Deuteronomy*)

Actions

Jump up and down five times, saying, "God rocks!"

Pat your head and rub your tummy.

Touch elbows with three other people.

Walk like a person going through the Jordan.

Kneel down and say, "Thank you, God!"

Act like a monkey.

Show us your "fish face."

Sing the ABCs.

Do three push-ups.

Play "London Bridge" with two other people.

Cover your eyes. Then say what color your teacher's shoes are.

Act like a person carrying a huge rock.

Imitate an elephant.

High-five your teacher.

Skip around the room.

Go outside, come in again, and say, "Behold, the Promised Land!"

Left-Right Reading

Note to Teacher: Give children their name rocks. Read the story slowly, and have the children pass their rocks to the right when you read "right" and to the left when you read "left." Repeat, trying with fewer rocks, if needed.

Joshua 3 and 4

When the people of Israel **left** Egypt, they **left** gladly. They **left** behind a life of slavery and nonstop work. They **left** and followed Moses, hoping he knew the **right** way to go to get to the Promised Land. Moses led them **right** to Mount Sinai, where he **left** them at the bottom and went **right** up to the top to meet God. God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, which told the people the **right** way to live. They put the commandments into a special box called the Ark of the Covenant, and when they **left** Mount Sinai, it went **right** along with them.

It took years and years to get to the Promised Land. Many people died, and were buried, and were **left** behind. Even Moses died. The new leader was Joshua, and he took up **right** where Moses **left** off. He led the people **right** up to the edge of the Promised Land. All they had **left** to do was cross the Jordan River. God said to Joshua, "Today the people will know that I am **right** by your side, as I was with Moses. When you come to the edge of the Jordan, you shall walk **right** in." And the Lord told Joshua how to do it.

Joshua told the priests, "Pick up the Ark of the Covenant and carry it **right** into the Jordan River." So they did. And **right** when their feet touched the water, the water just **left**! It stood up in a great big heap, on their **left** and on their **right**. And the people **left** the banks of the river and walked **right** through on dry ground! The priests stayed **right** there in the middle of the river, while all the people crossed the river.

Joshua said to the people, "Twelve of you, one from each tribe, pick up a rock **right** from the middle of the riverbed, and take it with you." So they did. Then, when all the people had crossed, the priests picked the Ark of the Covenant **right** up, and **left** the Jordan, and the waters went **right** back to where they were before.

Joshua led the people to a place called Gilgal, and there they **left** the rocks from the Jordan River. He said, "In years to come, when your children come **right** up to these rocks and ask, 'What do they mean?' you can say, 'These rocks were **left** here to remember how the Lord led us **right** through the water of the Jordan river.' "

AWESOME ADVENTURES!

Joshua
Joshua 3:7-4:7

I'll just watch you from here.

No! C'mon and get in!

Jake is ready to swim, but Anna is nervous.

I know a Bible story that might help.

... the waters flowing from above stood still ...

Cool! Let's go!

The kids see Joshua's dry path through the Jordan River.

No one even looks scared ...

They know that God is watching over them.

Bring twelve stones from the riverbed, and follow me.

Let's make this snappy.

The kids help gather the stones.

What are these stones for?

So we can always remember how God was with us in the Jordan River.

Do you think I can take that Ark back with me?

Uh ... no. But you can have a rock.

God was with us in the river ...

And God is with us here, too!

Read the amazing story yourself in Joshua 3 and 4.



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Let us know when your child may miss a session and we will send home the comic page and the For the Home sheet so you can have a Bible adventure wherever you are.

Main Idea

We remember how God was with Joshua and the Israelites as they crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land.

Something to Remember

"When your children ask their parents in time to come, 'What do these stones mean?' then you shall let your children know."
—Joshua 4:21–22a

In class today . . .

. . . we read the story of Joshua and the children of Israel crossing over the Jordan into the Promised Land. Like the story from the previous generation of Moses crossing the Red Sea in Exodus, this story has a miraculous crossing of a body of water, where the people walk across on dry ground. We learned that God was with the people, and when they had finished crossing over, they wanted to remember. They built a pile of rocks they had taken from the middle of the Jordan River, and put them together, under Joshua's direction.

Talk with your child about . . .



. . . times you remember God being with you. Do you have items in your home that remind you of those times? Can your child point to times in his or her life when he or she experienced God at work? What reminds you of that time, and is there something you can set aside to serve as a visual reminder of it?

Cairns, Ducks, and Inukshuks

Explore with your child a few other kinds of significant rock piles. Check online for images and kid-friendly explanations of the following:

Inukshuks: Made by the Inuit people of Canada. These human-shaped rock formations often mark hunting trails.

Ducks: One name given to rock piles that point the way on hiking trails.

Cairns: Landmarks built from stones or rocks. They may mark a trail or serve as a place of rest and reflection.

Make One

Gather some stones of varying sizes and shapes, including some with flat sides, to keep in a special place at home. Talk about how Joshua told the people of Israel to place the stones they gathered from the Jordan River in a pile so that they could remind their children of how God was with them in their journey. Encourage your child and others in the family to use the stones to build a small monument when they want to recognize God at work in their day. The stones can be stacked or arranged. A prayer can be said. Then the stones can be rearranged the next time.

