



God Reveals His Might at the Jordan

Joshua 3:1–5:1



LESSON GOAL

Students will remember God's might and demonstrate godly fear by obeying Him.

BIBLE TRUTHS

- The Jordan blocked Israel's way to the Promised Land.
- The priests and people were told to cross.
- When the priests' feet touched the water, the Jordan stopped flowing.
- A memorial was made to remember what God had done.
- God stopped the Jordan to show His power and protection of Israel as they entered the Promised Land.

KEY VERSE

"That all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever" (Joshua 4:24).

APPLICATION

- Be encouraged that God is mighty in difficult circumstances.
- Remember God's mighty acts in the Bible and in salvation.
- Recall times when you saw God working in a difficult situation.

NEXT WEEK

God gives Jericho to Israel
Read Joshua 6.

Symbol Key



Craft



Finger Play



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Center



Activity



Q & A



Age Group

4

PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul.... You shall teach them to your children” (Deuteronomy 11:18–19).

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here to aid you in understanding the Scripture.

Bible Background

The beginning of Joshua records how God encouraged His people Israel before they entered the Promised Land. In chapter 1, God promised that He would be with the new leader Joshua, would give him victory over his enemies, and would give Israel the land. In chapter 2, God revealed through the spies’ interaction with Rahab that the inhabitants of the Promised Land were terrified by the Israelites’ presence across the Jordan. The people had heard how God had dried the Red Sea and had given the Israelites victory over the pagan kings east of the Jordan. Rahab’s confession of faith in the victorious God of Israel must have been especially encouraging. The spies returned saying, “Truly the LORD has delivered all the land into our hands” (Josh. 2:24). God had not finished encouraging His people. In Joshua 3–5:1, God revealed that He is mighty.

After the spies returned, the multitude of Israelites left their camp in the Acacia Grove and traveled to the Jordan River (Josh. 3:1). For three days, they camped near the Jordan, probably wondering how they were going to cross the river. Near the Dead Sea, the Jordan is approximately 100 feet wide and varies in depth from two to ten feet. Although not remarkably deep, the river is shallow and swift and has many rapids. To make matters worse, the river was even larger than normal because of seasonal flooding (3:15). While a couple of spies could cross at one of its many fords, the Israelites probably worried how they could get their families and possessions across the river. (The total number of Israelites was probably near two million. Although the fighting men from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh crossed with Israel, the rest of the people stayed on the east side of the Jordan.)

Joshua 3:2–13 records various instructions given to the people, the priests, and Joshua. Perhaps the people were surprised when officers came and told them not where to cross the river, but instead simply to follow “the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God” (3:3). When the people saw the priests carrying the ark, they were to follow but to be careful to keep a distance of about a thousand yards (2,000 cubits) between the ark and themselves (3:4). The ark, which normally was located in the Most Holy Place, symbolized to Israel the very presence of God (Ex. 25:22; Num. 7:8–9). The people must have been encouraged that God was going to go before them into the Promised Land. Although the distance would be a reminder of the holiness of God, it also would allow the people to “know the way by which you must go” (Josh. 3:4). Joshua also instructed the people, “Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you” (3:5). Joshua does not record how the people were to sanctify themselves. In Exodus 19:14–15, the people prepared for seeing God’s presence by washing their clothes and refraining from sexual relations. No doubt these external preparations reflected an internal examination and confession of sins. The people were to prepare their hearts to see God do something amazing and powerful, although Joshua had not yet revealed what He was going to do.

Before Joshua gave the command to go, the Lord promised him, “I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you” (Josh. 3:7). It was important for Israel to be able to trust their new leader. God was about to demonstrate that Joshua was as authorized to lead the people as Moses had been. The Lord commanded Joshua to tell the priests that when they came to the Jordan, they were to stand in the water (3:8). Both priests and people had been given commands, but it had not yet been revealed how the people were going to get across the Jordan or even what would happen to the priests who would be standing in the water!

Before leaving, Joshua called all the people together to “hear the words of the LORD your God” (Josh. 3:9). Not only did God want to encourage the people that He had chosen Joshua to be their leader, but He also wanted the people to know that their conquering of the Promised Land would be successful. Joshua said, “By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites” (3:10). Finally, God revealed His plan to the people: “As soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap” (3:13). Imagine the comfort that these words must have brought to this second generation of Israel, most of whom had not seen God part the Red Sea! God again was going to part the waters! The only true God had not changed; He still cared for His people and was about to reveal His might.

Just as the feet of the priests carrying the ark dipped into the water, the waters rose in a heap! God had dammed the waters at Adam, a city approximately 15 miles north of where the priests were standing (Josh. 3:16). The water did not continue to trickle past the priests. It automatically stopped as soon as their feet touched the water (3:15). And to add to the miracle, the priests stood on dry ground (3:17)! Not only had the waters been miraculously stopped, but the ground had been dried. The Lord, whose presence was symbolized by the ark, was truly acting on behalf of His people.

The Lord had previously commanded Joshua to select one man from each of the 12 tribes of Israel (Josh. 3:12). The Lord now revealed what these men were chosen for: each man was to take a stone from where the priests were standing (4:2–3). The men were commanded to carry the stones from the riverbed on their shoulders until they arrived at Israel’s next camp (4:8). The stones would serve as a reminder to the Israelites of what God had done by stopping the Jordan (4:7).

After all the people had hurried across the river (including the 12 men with the memorial stones), “the ark of the Lord and the priests crossed over in the presence of the people” (Josh. 4:11). Joshua commanded the priests to leave the Jordan (4:17). The moment the priests’ feet reached the edge of the river, “the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks as before” (4:18). God knew how forgetful his people were. When Israel arrived in Gilgal, on the eastern border of Jericho, Joshua set up the 12 stones that the men had carried from the Jordan (Josh. 4:19–20). The stones were to be a reminder between one Israelite generation and the next. Joshua commanded the people, “When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, ‘What are these stones?’ then you shall let your children know, saying, ‘Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land’” (4:22). The miraculous crossing of the Jordan was a powerful reminder that God’s love for Israel had not changed. A generation before, at the crossing of the Red Sea, God had similarly collected the waters “in a heap” and allowed Israel to go through on “dry ground” (Ex. 14:16; 15:8). God’s powerful working on behalf of His people would be an awesome encouragement as Israel prepared to enter the Promised Land.

The text mentions four specific purposes for God choosing such a dramatic entrance into the Promised Land. In Joshua 3:10, God revealed the first reason. The mighty act would encourage Israel that Yahweh was the one true God and that He would drive out the inhabitants of the Promised Land. The second reason is that the crossing confirmed Joshua as leader of the people (Josh. 4:14). When Israel crossed the Red Sea, the people trusted Moses as their leader (Ex. 14:31). Now that Israel had crossed the Jordan River, the people similarly feared (or revered) Joshua (Josh. 4:14). The third reason was so “that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty” (Josh. 4:24). The hearts of the kings throughout the Promised Land melted in fear, and “there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel” (Josh. 5:1). Finally, the miraculous crossing of the Jordan was yet one more reason for Israel to “fear the LORD your God forever” (Josh. 4:24). The pile of stones in Gilgal was a visible reminder for parents to always tell their children about God’s mighty act. Believers should remember to tell of God’s mighty acts so that both they and their children will fear the Lord, remember His merciful power, and keep His commandments.

POINT TO THE TRUTH

*“Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth”
(Psalm 78:1).*

This section includes questions to review last week’s lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week’s lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



Review Questions

Use these questions to review and reinforce key truths.

How many spies did Joshua send into Jericho?

Two.

Whose house did the spies stay at for the night?

Rahab’s.

What did Rahab do when the king sent messengers to her house, demanding that she turn over the two spies?

Rahab hid the spies and told the king’s soldiers that the spies had left.

Why did Rahab help the spies?

She had faith in God.

What did Rahab hang from her window as a sign that the Israelites were not to destroy her?

A scarlet cord.



Memorials

On your birthday each year, you probably have a party with a birthday cake and candles. Each year, married people have an anniversary when they remember another year of marriage. In Arlington, Virginia, there is a tomb with a soldier in it

whose name no one knows. This is called the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. It reminds Americans of the soldiers who died for their country in all the past wars, but who were never identified. The Statue of Liberty symbolizes the freedom of our country. It is a symbol that has reminded many immigrants who have come to America for what our nation has stood. Each of these things is a memorial. A memorial reminds people of an important event, person, or belief. In our lesson today, Israel will build a memorial remembering God bringing them through the Jordan River to the Promised Land.



The Fear of the Lord

Ask the students to name some things that they are afraid of (spiders, the dark, getting lost, thunder and lightning, dogs, fire, etc.). What makes them afraid of these things? Is it because they are not accustomed to them or because they may be hurt by them? Fear can make us too scared to go near something or touch it. It can make us hide and cry. But fear also can help us treat things with the proper respect (for example, not playing with fire or making sure we stay near mom in shops). Do you know that God wants us to be afraid of Him? God does not want us to run away from Him and cry, but He wants us to remember His great holiness and power and treat Him with proper respect when we come to Him. People who do not love God should be afraid that He will punish them for their sins.



Cross Over

Near the entrance to the classroom, make a river for the children to cross as they come to class. You can make the river using long strips of blue cellophane or plastic wrap and the river banks by using brown wrapping paper or wadded up paper bags. Tell the children that in today's lesson, they will learn how the Israelites crossed the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land. During the lesson, refer to the children's crossing. Did they jump over or walk across? God had a special way for the Israelites to cross that would demonstrate His power.



Crossing Games

Using the "river" above or other obstacles, play some running games with the students. Have them race from one side of the room to the other, going around the obstacles. In the final race, clear all obstacles out of the way and let the students race across freely. During the lesson, talk about the obstacle the Israelites faced getting to the Promised Land, and how God cleared all obstacles.



Can You Do That?

Begin by discussing "mighty" things that people have done. They have built structures such as the Eiffel Tower and the Great Wall of China. They have learned to fly and even have gone to the moon. They have learned to treat diseases. They have done many things. Ask the students to name some things that people can't do. They can't create something out of nothing; they can't raise the dead; etc. But God can do anything. Discuss the mighty acts that God has done in the past. List some of God's mighty acts on the board. Just a few of God's mighty acts are: creation, the flood, the exodus, parting the Red Sea, and Jesus' resurrection. Finally, ask the students what should be their response to God's might.



A Fearful Reputation

Ask the students what kinds of things they fear. Explain that the Canaanites were very afraid of something. They were afraid of God. They had heard about His reputation. They had heard about His parting the Red Sea 40 years earlier. And as Israel

was about to cross into the Promised Land, God chose to demonstrate His power by doing the same thing again. God stopped the force of the water of the Jordan to usher Israel into the land



Memorial Call-and-Response

Ask the students how they remember important things, such as their parents' birthdays or tasks they must fulfill (such as cleaning their rooms). They may say that they repeat it over and over to themselves, write themselves a note, or even tie a string around their finger. God gave Israel a way to remember the amazing works that He had done for them. He told them to create a memorial out of rocks and place it on the side of the Jordan. Explain to the students that one way to remember something is with a chant, or a call-and-response. Practice this call-and-response by using it in the lesson. When you say, "What are these stones?" the students should respond: "Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land!" Encourage them to repeat the chant to their parents after church.



Who Must Follow God?

Materials: three wooden craft sticks per student; circular pictures of the Israelites, the priests, and Joshua (at back of lesson); glue; scissors

Directions: Before the lesson, pass out the materials. Direct the students to color and cut out the three circles and then glue one circle to each craft stick. During the lesson, encourage the students to hold up the stick that indicates whether God is giving directions to all the Israelites, only the priests, or only Joshua.



Chosen Authority

Discuss with the students that when they came into the room, their parents passed on authority over them to the teachers. This illustration can link the concept of God passing on authority to Moses to be the leader over Israel. The authority that was given to Moses was later passed on to Joshua.

PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

"Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done" (Psalm 78:4).

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included that you can use to proclaim your worship to God. Use the lesson questions to check the students' understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use during the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done directly from the Bible.

Bible Lesson

In today's lesson, we will hear how God showed His great power to the children of Israel. God had chosen Joshua to be the new leader of Israel. Joshua had to listen to and obey God's commands so that Israel would have success in taking possession of the Promised Land. God promised Joshua in Joshua 3:7, "I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you." Israel needed to trust the new leader God had put in charge,

and God was going to prove His choice of Joshua by doing a miracle. This would be a sign to the people that God was with Joshua, just as He had been with Moses. The Israelites were camped at the shore of the Jordan River. The Jordan River was very large and had very swift rapids, making it dangerous to cross. It would have been scary to stand on its banks and think of walking across. Can you picture the people of Israel standing there? Everyone would have to cross the river—Joshua, the priests, parents and children; all their sheep, cows, goats, and camels; and all their belongings. There were many people—probably around two million. That’s a lot! But God knew how they were going to cross the river, and His plan is always perfect.

Joshua called the people together to tell them to prepare themselves because God was going to do wonders among them. They needed to get their hearts clean before God and be ready to hear His instructions. The next day, Joshua said, “Hear the words of the LORD your God” (Josh. 3:9). God wanted the people to trust Him and not be afraid. He told Joshua to tell the Israelites what was going to happen.

God was going to stop the waters of the Jordan River, just as He had stopped the waters of the Red Sea after the Israelites had escaped from Egypt. Can you imagine going across the river with all the water stacked up like a big wall? Well, that is what God planned to do.

This was the plan. The first people in line to cross were the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord. As soon as the priests’ feet touched the water, the ground would be dry—no puddles and no mess, just dry dirt to cross on. How awesome for God to stack up the water and make the ground dry all at once. The people were to follow the priests at a distance to show respect for God’s presence.

The ark of the covenant was the symbol God chose to show Himself to the people, and now it was important for them to do just as God told them. The Israelites did just as God had said. The priests with the ark went first, down the riverbank and into the water. As soon as they stepped into the water, the water stopped running, and they stood on dry ground, just as God had said. What a parade it must have been—over a million people with all their belongings crossing the dry riverbed with a wall of water about 15 miles away. All the Israelites made it safely across.

God had given them some special instructions to remember this day. One man from each of the twelve tribes was to pick up a stone and carry it on his shoulder to the other side of the river. These twelve men were to make a monument that would serve as a reminder to Israel of their great and mighty God. Everyone did just as they were told, and when all the people crossed the river and were up on the bank on the other side, the “waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks as before” (4:18).

God knew His people were forgetful, and the monument was to be a reminder for them and their children. It was set up at Gilgal, a city not far from Jericho. When Israelite children saw the monument, their parents would tell them how great God is and how He had been with them as they crossed the Jordan River on dry ground.

What can we learn from this story? God has not changed. He is the same today as He was when the Israelites crossed the Jordan. He cares very much about each of us and how we live. He has given us His Word, the Bible, to tell us of His great love. It is important for us to read and study God’s Word so we can know His plan for us. It is important for us to talk about how great our God is and how He blesses us and does great things for us. We should always give Him praise and glory. Let’s pray to Him and thank Him for all He has done.



Lesson Questions

What river did the Israelites need to cross in order to enter the Promised Land?

The Jordan River.

Was this a safe river to cross?

No. It was a large river, and there were swift rapids.

What miracle did God do to make it possible for the Israelites to cross?

He stopped the waters from flowing just as He had done at the Red Sea.

Why were the people of Israel required to stay back from the ark of the covenant?

The ark of the covenant was a symbol of God's presence, and the people needed to be respectful of God's holiness.

Did all the people make it safely across?

Yes.

What did God tell the Israelites to make as a reminder of His mighty act?

A memorial of stones.

Presentation Ideas



A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards

Use appropriate A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards with the lesson.



Betty Lukens Flannelgraph

Use appropriate flannelgraph pieces with the lesson.



Indoor Sandbox

Set up a classroom sandbox in a large plastic box, such as an under-bed box or storage crate. Instead of sand, you might also use dry oatmeal, dry rice, or beans. Bring plastic cups, spoons, shovels, and other sand toys. During the lesson, use some or all for a demonstration. Add water to the sand and talk about the Jordan River. Then drain out the water. The sand is still wet. God made the riverbed completely dry for the Israelites to cross. He is amazing and powerful!



The Dry Jordan

Materials: fine-grain play sand and silicone spray (You may also want some kind of disposable tray for drying sand. Any surface sprayed with silicone will be very slippery.)

Directions: To illustrate what it was like when the priests with the ark stepped into the Jordan River, create your own "magic sand" by spraying fine-grain play sand with silicone spray. Pour water over the sand, and then pour off the excess water. The sand will be completely dry. (Be very careful not to breathe in any silicone vapors when spraying sand.)



River Scene

Materials: brown paper bags, newspaper, materials for river (see below), cardboard box, broom handles or wrapping-paper tubes, paint, cardboard, tape or glue



Directions: Act out the crossing of the Jordan River with the class. To prepare, build an ark using a cardboard box and two long wrapping-paper tubes or broom handles. This can be painted, and cherubs, cut from cardboard, can be attached to the top.

Turning brown grocery bags inside out and stuffing crushed newspaper inside can create the rocks for the memorial. The ends can be closed with staples. The Jordan River can be made using blue painted cardboard, plastic wrap, crepe paper, or a variety of other materials. The river would need to separate in the middle for Israel to cross through.

A Day Unlike Any Other

Talk about what it must have been like for the Israelite children traveling through the wilderness. They may have ridden on animals or in wagons every day for their whole lives, traveling with a group of two million people. Today we will learn about a day that would be unlike any other. The children who crossed the Jordan that day would tell their children and grandchildren about the miracle God did.

Praise and Worship

Awesome God

Great Is Thy Faithfulness

He's Got the Whole World in His Hands

Mighty Is Our God

My God Is So Great

Trust and Obey

“Over the River”

(Sing to the tune of “Over the River and through the Woods”)

Over the river on firm, dry ground to the Promised Land we go.

God knows the way; we'll follow today.

He'll protect us from our foe!

Repeat



On Dry Ground

The people camped upon the shore and watched the Jordan flow;
(Hold hands in triangle shape to indicate tents; shade eyes with hand.)

So swift and wide its waters poured, across they could not go.
(Move hands back and forth like a flowing river; shake head.)

But then before their very eyes, God did an awesome act:
(Point up; make “surprised” face.)

He made the river's waters rise and stand up in a stack.
(Raise hands in front of body; then move them wide apart.)

The priests walked over on dry ground; the people came behind.
(March in place.)

Twelve stones were set up in a mound to be a lasting sign.
(Pretend to stack stones.)

This story tells us something true: the Lord is great and strong;
(Hold up finger; flex biceps.)

There's nothing that He cannot do. So praise Him all day long!
(Shake head; raise hands upward.)

PRACTICE THE TRUTH

"That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (Psalm 78:7).

Choose ideas from this section to review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



Mighty Block Reminder

Materials: copies of the "Mighty Block Reminder" craft page, scissors, crayons, small rocks

Directions: Give each student a copy of the craft page to cut out. Students should fold along the dotted lines to form a small box. Use glue to keep the bottom and sides together. The top should open and close like a lid. After the boxes have dried, the students can place a small rock inside. Talk to them about the rocks that the Israelites gathered to build an altar commemorating their crossing of the Jordan River (Joshua 3-4).



Stay Back

In this variation of "Follow the Leader," the students follow the leader, who carries the "ark." However, the students must stay five feet behind the leader. Talk about God's instructions for the Israelites to cross the Jordan River behind the ark of the covenant. Why did they have to stay back? The ark represented God's presence among the Israelites.



3-D Coloring Sheet

Materials: coloring page showing Israel crossing the Jordan, crayons, sand or salt, glitter, small stones

Directions: Give the students the coloring sheet, and allow them to color in the pictures. Next, instruct them to use the glitter to accent the standing Jordan. They should also spread a thin layer of glue on the Jordan riverbed. Sand or salt can then be sprinkled on the glue. Another option is to glue small pebbles on the riverbed.



Stones of Remembrance

Materials: 12 pebbles for each student, 5x5-inch cardboard squares, glue (or a hot-glue gun)

Directions: After the lesson, take the class outside, and have each student collect 12 pebbles. If you do not have an area in which to collect pebbles, bring in stones yourself, or ask the students to bring in pebbles the week before. (You may want to give each student a bag labeled "12 pebbles" to remind him to collect the pebbles.) Once all students have their pebbles, direct them to build a memorial on the cardboard square. Students should use the glue to fasten the pebbles together. Instruct students to write Joshua 4:24 around the edge of the cardboard to remind



them of the purpose of their memorial. For a quicker drying time, teachers may choose to glue the memorials themselves, using a hot-glue gun.

Israel's Campsite

Materials: blank paper, pieces of construction paper or fabric, scissors, glue, sandpaper

Directions: Let the students create a picture of what the Israelites' campsite may have looked like after they crossed the Jordan. The students can cut tents from construction paper or fabric and then glue them onto the blank piece of paper around a pile of sandpaper or construction-paper rocks. Behind this scene, have the students draw the Jordan River. Talk with them about God's leadership and the miracle that allowed His people to cross the river.

Coloring Sheets

Give each student copies of the coloring sheets at the back of the lesson. Students can color the pages in class or at home.



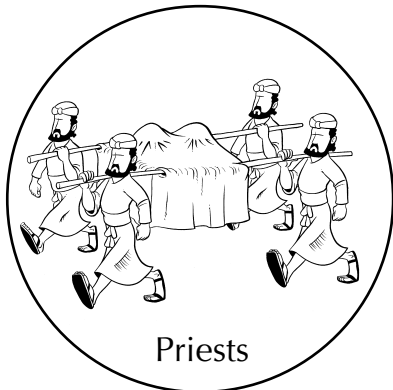
MEMORY VERSE

"That all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever" (Joshua 4:24).

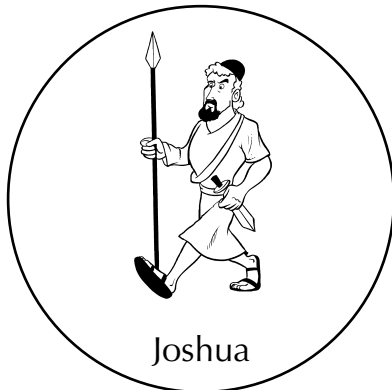
Who Must Follow God?



Israel



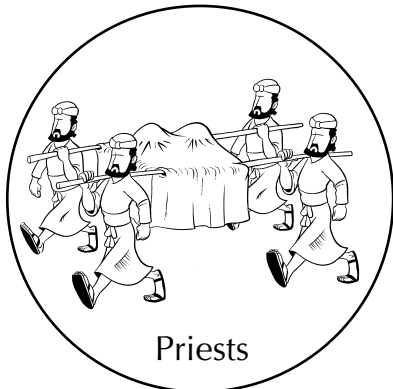
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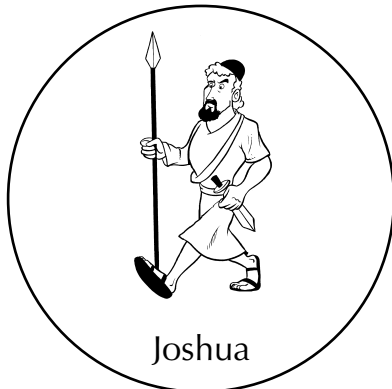
Joshua



Israel



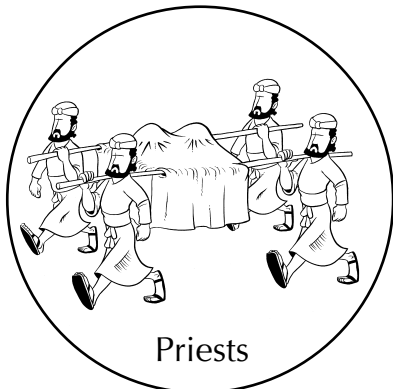
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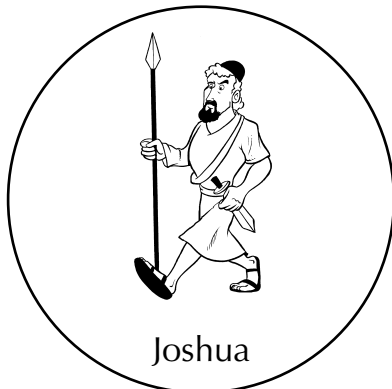
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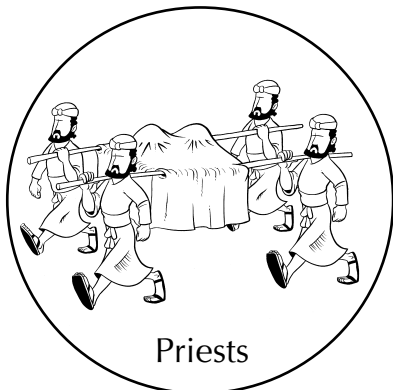
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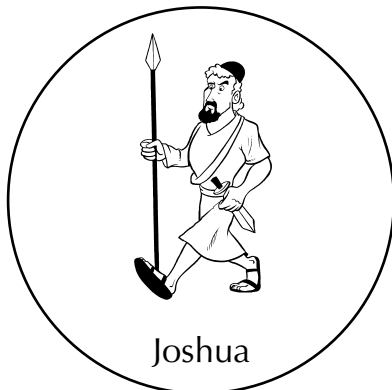
Joshua



Israel



Priests



Joshua

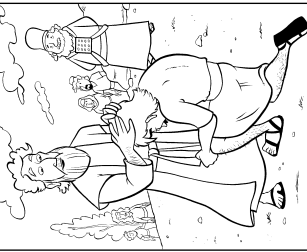
Mighty Block Reminder

Remember God's Mighty Act

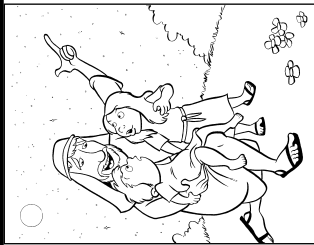


He parted the Jordan...

and to show all
the people of
the earth that
God is mighty
(Joshua 4:24).

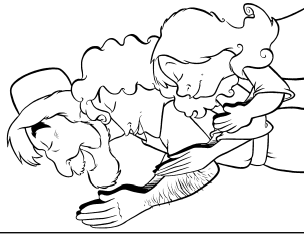


to confirm Joshua as their
leader (Joshua 4:14),

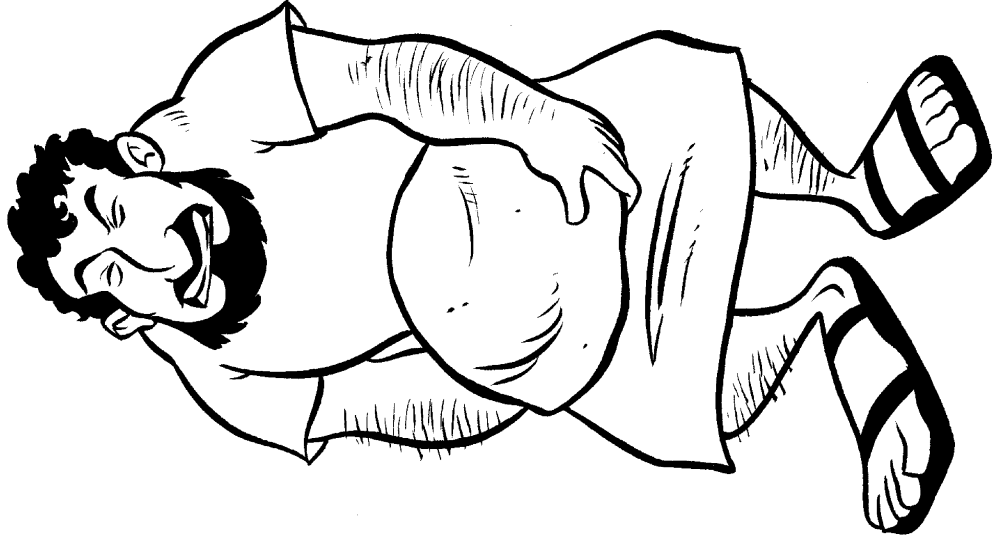
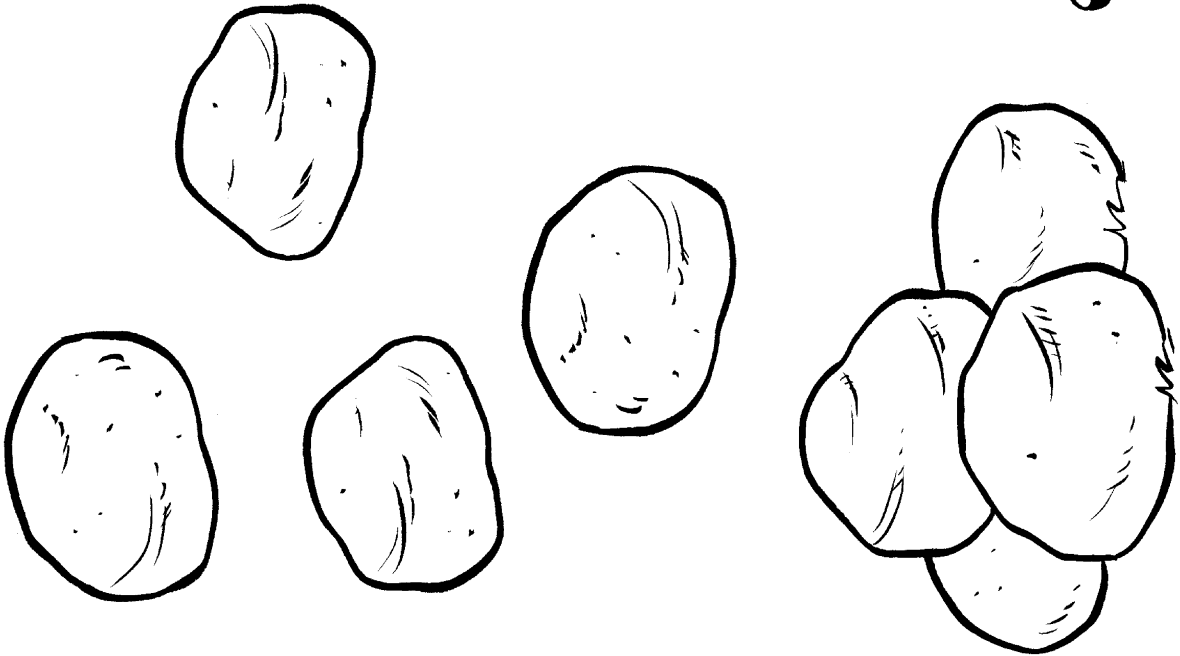


to encourage Israel that God
is mighty (Joshua 3:10),

“For the LORD your God
dried up the waters of the
Jordan before you until you
had crossed over...that all
the peoples of the earth
may know the hand of the
LORD, that it is mighty, that
you may fear the LORD
your God forever”
(Joshua 4:23–24).



So, fear the Lord your God
forever (Joshua 4:24).







"All Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan" (Joshua 3:17).



**“And these stones shall be a memorial to the children of Israel forever”
(Joshua 4:7b).**

