

Get Ready!

Crossing the Jordan River

By: Daniel Smead



Text

Joshua 3:1-17

Key Quest Verse

“Joshua told the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.’” Joshua 3:5

Bible Background

On the tenth day of the first month, the people crossed Jordan. Passover, which commemorated the exodus event, was to be celebrated on the 14th day of that month.

When the Hebrews turned back from the Promised Land 40 years earlier it was because they had feared to attack a people they considered stronger than themselves. Now their entrance into the land takes a more dramatic form than simply reaching the edge of the territory of the Canaanites or Amalekites or Amorites. This time they are to cross a recognizable geographic barrier, and do so by miraculous means. They are to walk right through the Jordan River during its flood stage. This event mirrors (and in part reverses) the crossing of the sea which concluded the first stage of the Exodus and which entailed the destruction of Pharaoh and his army. This crossing places the Hebrews in the middle of enemy territory, and also may have been intended by God to preempt any individuals’ thoughts about turning back later. (It is a dramatic gesture, akin to an attacking army which burns its boats upon arriving. Or perhaps it is similar to Julius’ crossing of the Rubicon River, which made his intentions of marching on Rome plain and denied his army any choice but to go forward.)

The crossing of the river was pictured this way: “the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.” (Josh. 4:7). Moses had directed the waters of a sea to remain apart by raising his arms, with the staff that God had made a special symbol of divine power, but now a different symbol was employed to demonstrate that God was acting, and this was not a random event or the power of some human ruler. It could look like the people were able to cross because God would not permit the ark to be swept away. Events like this, and the victory at Jericho, may have imparted to the ark the kind of aura which led Eli’s sons to use it like a magic talisman years later (1 Sam. 4). In verse 12 of our text twelve men, one from each tribe and half-tribe (other than Levi) were selected for a task which is not explained until chapter 4. They each were to collect a stone from between the banks of the Jordan. Those stones were used by Joshua to build a monument to this event. The selection of twelve stones by twelve chosen members of the tribes may be God’s mirroring of the 12 spies event from Kadesh Barnea. Rather than these representatives of the nation being sent to find the way they are called upon to provide a visual reminder that God was there before them and prepared a way.

Get Ready!

Lesson Quest

What I want my students to:

Know: That God directed the Hebrew people to have faith to pass through the Jordan by the aid of a miracle, and commit to a new period in their lives (in a new place, with new challenges).

Feel: That transitions are important aspects of living, and that God-inaugurated transitions require commitment on our parts.

Do: Consider what transitions have taken place in their lives, or are still needed, and commit themselves to be devoted to Christ in these changes and following them.

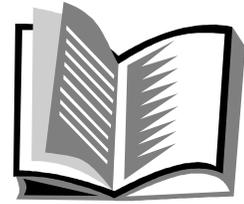
Leader's Devotion

The east bank of the Jordan was an exciting place to be in today's Bible story. The people were about to enter the land God had promised, and they were doing it in a remarkable way. The event was to be so special that Joshua instructed the people to consecrate themselves in advance of God's activity. God wasn't concerned with providing a way back for the tribes, they were being directed to go forward in God's power for God's purposes. They were not to emphasize the failed first attempt to enter the land, and they were not to rest on the laurels of their recent victories over Sihon and Og. They were to move forward.

God gave us the gift of a memory, but we humans can spend too much time looking backward. We may just be letting the morning's irritations distract us from the moment. Sometimes we have events from days, weeks, or even years before nagging at us and bringing us down. We ponder old sins, old mistakes, old regrets or embarrassments. We are to learn from the past, not live in it.

Not everything we look back to is negative, and it isn't always bad to look backward. The Hebrews had various events in their national history that they were meant to look back on as evidence of God's great power and great love for them (like the Exodus itself, or the promises made to Abraham) but that was never to prevent them from seeing the present.

Jesus once chided the Pharisees for considering that they had a good relationship with God simply because they were descended from Abraham, without looking at who they were *now* and what they were called to. Jesus turned around the evidence of God's miraculous actions for the people of Israel by declaring that the God who was able to do these things was not restricted to accepting the Pharisees in their current condition, but could simply make new children for Abraham – Jesus said that they could be made even from the stones, though that turned out not to be God's intention. Notice that Jesus said these would be counted as Abraham's *children*, not even simply as people accepted by God. Through Jesus you are able to be a descendant of Abraham, part of Jesus' body and therefore related to the promises by his blood. This is a possibility that is astounding but true. God deals with impossible possibilities, by our standards, and it is that kind of thinking that your students need to learn. Today help your students to conceive of the world in a new way, to consider all the changes that the Hebrews were stepping into and the fact that they

Get Set!**Option A****Forty Years**

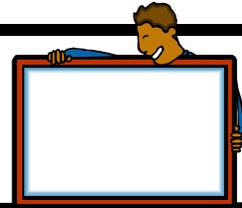
Materials: None required; optional: bring an almanac, or run a web search for an online almanac

Procedure: This opening idea notices that the crossing of the Jordan River finished out a forty-year period for the Hebrews in which almost everything they were familiar with changed. You will be trying to get your students to think about how much changes in that amount of time.

What are some of the big changes in the news in the last few years? (Perhaps the events of September 11, 2001 will come up; cloning; etc.) **What year were you born? Do you know what was happening in the world that year?** [You might use an almanac at this point to give examples of each year's big events in the news.] (You might generalize significant changes since that time, like changes to the stability of the world, or changes specific to the student's family – moving, age of parents, etc.) **What was happening forty years ago?** (Invite your students to make what general statements they can, perhaps from what they are familiar with from school, they might mention that the Cold War was underway, or name various things that didn't exist yet. You might wish to use some specific examples that will help identify how much has changed, or what people were experiencing then. If you are teaching this lesson in 2004, for example, Lyndon Johnson was president because Kennedy had been assassinated in 1963; the Beatles were just coming to the United States in 1964; Nelson Mandela was beginning his "life" sentence in South Africa (he was released in 1990 and became South Africa's first black leader after apartheid ended, elected in 1994); the United States was entering the Vietnam War; China set off its first atomic weapon; there was a famous slaying of three civil rights workers in Mississippi; a first class U.S. stamp cost five cents; the films *Mary Poppins*, *My Fair Lady*, and *Dr. Strangelove* were out; color television was entering U.S. homes; former President Herbert Hoover died; the U.S. Surgeon General condemned cigarette smoking as causing cancer, based on reports from the 1950s and on.)

In today's Bible story we are going to be thinking about the situation of people who were "out of the mainstream" for forty years, and what they experienced when they went back in. Maybe things didn't change as rapidly in Bible times as they do now, or maybe we just don't recognize the importance of the changes which were happening. But even aside from those issues, there were some big changes in their own lives that these people had to deal with.

GO TO THE BIBLE STORY

Get Set!**Option B****Obstacles**

Materials: A chalkboard or marker board, and tools for writing and erasing

Procedure: This opening idea helps your students to think about the nature of the obstacles the Hebrews were facing as they came to the Promised Land. You will set up the discussion of these obstacles by posing a hypothetical situation in which the students can't enter their home after today's class.

Let's suppose that when you left here today you were going home, and when you arrived you couldn't get in because someone had dug a moat around where you live. Say they filled it with water, added some piranhas, and had barbed wire on the other side. What would you do? [As you describe this strange situation, illustrate the image on a chalkboard or marker board.] (Maybe stand there with mouth hanging open for a while; maybe call the police; maybe look for the cameras for some new reality joke show; *maybe* try to get through the obstacles on their own, but probably not.) **Normally you wouldn't face any kind of obstacle like this, though, would you?** (They might seem big at the time, but no nothing like this.) **What do you normally do when you meet an obstacle?** (Think it over for a while; barrel through the situation; give up on that route; ask for help or advice; pray about it.) What if God chose simply to take the obstacle out of your way? How would you feel? [As you ask this, erase the obstacles on your illustration.] (Grateful; wonder what God wants in return; maybe worry if the obstacle would come back when you were *inside* your home.)

In today's Bible story the Hebrews were faced with a big obstacle, but they didn't do anything about it directly. They were told to consecrate themselves to God, however. Let's check out what happened.

GO TO THE BIBLE STORY

Get Set!



Bible Story

Teacher Tip: Provide markers for students to highlight portions of the story in their Bibles

Joshua 3:1-17 (NIV)

¹ Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. ² After three days the officers went throughout the camp, ³ giving orders to the people: “When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. ⁴ Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it.”

⁵ Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.”

⁶ Joshua said to the priests, “Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people.” So they took it up and went ahead of them.

⁷ And the LORD said to Joshua, “Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. ⁸ Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: ‘When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river.’”

⁹ Joshua said to the Israelites, “Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. ¹⁰ This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. ¹¹ See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. ¹² Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³ And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD – the Lord of all the earth – set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap.”

¹⁴ So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them. ¹⁵ Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water’s edge, ¹⁶ the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

Get Set!



Bible Story cont.

Today's text has some awkward verse breaks. If you choose to read the text aloud, going around the class, you might structure the reading with chunks of text rather than individual verses. Verses 1-4, 5-8, 9-13, 14-17 is a suggested pattern.

You might also wish to show your class a picture of the Ark of the Covenant so that they can recall what it was like. If your class doesn't remember it, you will want to describe what it was for. (The ark held the tablets on which the ten commandments were written, among other things; it was meant to symbolize God's presence with the Hebrews; it was a gold-covered box of wood with representations of two angels on top, and the box had places where poles could be attached to it as handles; only Levites were allowed to touch it, anyone else who touched the actual box would die.)

Discuss the text with your class, perhaps following the pattern given here: **What stands out to you in this Bible passage, what is going on here?** (The people are finally getting to enter the land; God is using a miracle to allow the people to enter the land; the priests carried the ark into the water and then the water stopped so everyone else could walk through the river.) **Does this event remind you of anything else in the Bible?** (the crossing of the Red Sea when the Hebrews left Egypt) **What happened the first time the people were supposed to go into the land, at Kadesh Barnea?** (The 12 spies came to report on their visit into the land, and 10 of them gave a bad report indicating dangers in the area; the people refused to go in; when their punishment was declared to be wandering for 40 years and not entering the land then they tried to go in on their own and failed; Moses and the ark didn't go with them when they tried to go in on their own.) **This time God used a big event to get the people into the land, rather than just have them walk up to the first enemy town they reached and begin moving in. What do you think are some reasons for God to have used a miracle like this to get the people into the land?** (It sounds from verse 7 like this big event was supposed to help the people trust Joshua like they had trusted Moses; verses 10 and 11 point out that this method gave a strong statement about God being with the people as they entered the land, which they had doubted the first time; maybe this also helped cause fear in the people they were coming to fight, like the crossing of the Red Sea had done; maybe this also helped to prevent people from thinking about turning back, since the Jordan was at flood stage there was no good way to go back.)

The people could have gone from Egypt into the land in just a few weeks. Instead they stopped at Sinai for months, and then ended up wandering in the wilderness for decades. How might things have been different if Moses had led the people straight into the Promised Land? (They wouldn't have been ready; they wouldn't have known what God wanted from them, since they wouldn't have had Sinai; even after they had their experiences at Sinai they were too quick to think of God as like the idols in Egypt; at first they weren't mentally ready to be a nation, maybe the first generation had kept a "slave mentality" from Egypt that made it harder for them to think in terms of succeeding in battle even with God's help.)

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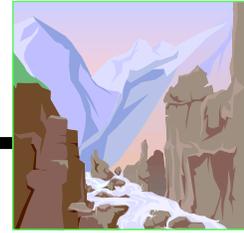
Get Set!**Bible Story cont.****Optional:**

If you choose not to use this way of discussing the text, or as an alternative for another week, you might ask your students to consider the parallels between the entry of the land and the way the people left Egypt. That would include issues like crossing through the waters, the need for trust in God, they were having to leave a place they understood and were familiar with for a place they did not know, the need to consecrate themselves before the Passover compared with the consecration here before the crossing of the river, the leadership given by one main person listening to God. Ask the students also to consider how things had changed in this time: they now had the Law, most of the people probably couldn't even remember Egypt, and everyone would have needed to deal with the fact that Moses who had led them for forty years was now replaced with Joshua. Maybe they will come up with suggestions you wouldn't have thought of, or maybe they will need some pushing to think this all through.

Additional information about the text:

For verse 1: recall, in case anyone is wondering, that Shittim means “acacia trees”

Verse 6: the ark of the covenant went ahead of the people on at least a couple of notable occasions, but apparently was normally put in the middle of the procession as the Hebrews traveled, as the tabernacle was when camp was set up in the wilderness (cf. Num. 2:17; 4:5, 15; 10:17, 21). You may recall that a pillar of cloud led the people when they traveled by day, and that it looked like a pillar of fire at night (compare Ex. 14:19, 20, 24; Num. 9:15-23). The ark is specifically noted as having been in front of the people when they first left Sinai, and the pillar of cloud over the people (Num. 10:33-36). Here at the Jordan we do not hear of the pillar anymore, and the fact that Joshua says the position of the ark will show the way implies that the pillar is no longer an issue. The ark's position is also noted specifically when the people marched around Jericho, though it did not lead that procession.

Go!**Got Any Rivers?****WORKSHEET/MUSIC**

Materials: “So What’s Your River?” worksheet; writing utensils; optional: music for the song “Got Any Rivers (You Think Are Uncrossable?)”

Quest Connection

Read the following to your students: **In today’s story the Hebrew people had their past separated from their future in a dramatic way. They crossed through a flood-swollen river with dry feet, and thus set out to conquer the Promised Land. That kind of miraculous division between what was and what is going to be does not often get duplicated in our lives, but sometimes it is obvious to us that we are experiencing a river crossing. We’re going to use that metaphor today to consider some of the major decisions or other experiences that we have individually faced in our lives.**

Procedure: Distribute the “So What’s Your River?” worksheet and writing instruments. To get your students started you could sing together the song “Got Any Rivers You Think Are Uncrossable?” (You may need to teach this to your class before you begin.) The emphasis of that song is that God works in ways that people don’t expect, in fact ways that others would think are impossible.

The obstacles we perceive in our lives sometimes are not as significant as we suppose them to be, but that may not be very helpful to tell teenagers. Their obstacles will generally seem quite significant to them, even if they won’t later in life. Don’t try to convince students to relay what they choose to write about on this worksheet to the class or to you, just accept that the obstacles are important to your students. But even the very big obstacles we face are well within God’s abilities to help us with (or to help us deal with accepting).

Close

After your students have finished the worksheet close with the comments below, followed by the suggested prayer time.

If you are facing a “river crossing” situation and haven’t gone to God for some help yet (or even if you have already brought the subject up to God, but you feel the need to do so again) you could spend some time in prayer now expressing how you are feeling and what you think you need from the Lord. We can all lend our support to each other in these situations. It is possible to pray for someone’s situation even if you don’t really understand what it involves. Just let us know that you would like some prayer. Close with a prayer time.

Go!**Goal Oriented****40 Years!****Materials:** None**Quest Connection**

The Hebrews experienced a very strange situation; they left the world scene for decades and then returned to it to become a nation. Normally this does not happen, and the idea of an entire people group wandering for 40 years *on purpose* is virtually inconceivable (imagine even as large of a group as a New England town choosing to go “Walden” like the author Thoreau for a few years; it would make all the papers, and maybe some competency hearings as well). Of course it helped that the Hebrews had no good reason to go back where they came from and had a long-range goal to keep them from settling down where they were or seeking some alternate destination. This activity will try to help your students to think about the kind of long-range planning that God did in this situation (which actually was already being acted on with Abram hundreds of years earlier, and which was to carry forward in its impact for thousands of more years), and help them to think through what long-range plans they have or could develop for their own lives.

Procedure: You might initially promote discussion between your students with these comments: **Consider the idea of voluntarily leaving everything you know to go spend forty years wandering in an isolated place.** (Actually, for this example the wilderness between Egypt and Israel might still be appropriate as a location to suggest.) **What things would you be giving up for that time period? What things would you really be giving up permanently, because they would not be retrievable in forty years?** After your students have answered these questions, help them to think through what emotions and concerns they would experience when the time came for their reemergence into the world at large. Have your students try to think through the Hebrews’ situation in terms of their understanding of their own likely feelings in that situation.

Having discussed the wildly hypothetical situation above, ask your students to describe goals that they actually have for their own lives. Pick a shorter time period to start with, maybe a year or five years, but then skip ahead to ask about goals over the next 40 years. (You could even insert a preliminary stop at goals for 20 years from now; it probably still won’t prepare their minds well for considering what they would want for 40 years from now.) Forty years is a lot farther than most teenagers will have thought ahead, so take some time to help them contemplate the question’s ramifications. First of all, can they envision being that old? Can they make some guesses about what things they like now they won’t be intrigued by then, and some things that might be significant to them then which are not now (like their children, or even their grandchildren!).

Go!**Goal Oriented Cont.**

Ask your students: **Can you suggest something that you care about now which you expect still to care about forty years from now?** (They might bring up a kind of music, literature, a hobby, or concern for the state of the environment – hopefully they will bring up God and Jesus as well). Some of your students may have a negative view of being in their fifties that will have them picturing their future self as tired, bored, and boring. Assure them that one thing which can allow a person of any age to have interest in life is to possess goals. There are problems with goals, however. People don't always create achievable goals. And when they do achieve their goals people don't always create new ones to replace the old ones. Sometimes people arrive at a point in their life where their goals don't seem possible, or they no longer seem purposeful, and they despair. Some of these people will turn to alcohol, or drugs, or illicit sex, or thrill seeking in other ways. Some of them will just give up. But God is one goal maker who always has good plans. At one point in the Bible God commented to the Israelites that the plans God had for them were plans to prosper them, not to harm them, and to give them hope and a future (Jer. 29:11); that is how God thinks about us as Christians also. If your class is in doubt on this consider Ephesians 2:4-10 with them.

Close

God is one constant we can trust in over the whole length of our lives. The Bible tells us that God made plans regarding us before we were even born, and that plans already exist for the future kept in waiting for all those who choose to be part of Jesus' family. God helps people with the short term goals (which for God includes not just one year goals but also forty year ones), but God also is open to real long-term planning as well. It was worth it for the Hebrews to wait forty years to do something that God saw as worth waiting for, and it will be worth it for each one of us to take God's message and God's love seriously and live a life expecting good things from our Lord.

Whatever age we are, whatever our strengths or weaknesses, God has appropriate goals for our lives. Just like our memory verse, Joshua 3:5, says about the Hebrews preparing to cross the Jordan, it makes sense for *us* to consecrate ourselves to God, preparing ourselves to serve and living in expectation of the "amazing things" God will do among us and through us. Great things will happen in our lives, and we need to be ready for them.

Have a collective time of memorizing Joshua 3:5: "Joshua told the people, 'Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.'" Your students could pair off and practice saying that to each other. Perhaps your students would like to write that verse out on index cards, so that they can put it up in their locker, or on their dresser at home, or their car's dashboard. This is a truly viable and worthwhile short-term goal for any Christian, with a truly long-term impact.

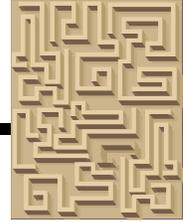
Have a prayer, perhaps asking your students if they want to use this opportunity to commit with God to attempt doing what their memory verse says.

Go!

Hidden Image

WORKSHEET

Materials: The worksheet “Hidden Image”; pencils, markers or colored pencils



Quest Connection

In today’s lesson the Hebrews had a specific path they needed to follow to get through the river. In fact, the events in today’s Bible story were just the end of a long time period when they had been directed in their paths by God. Sometimes those paths may even have overlapped themselves. In this activity you will need to follow the paths in two overlapping mazes. The mazes on your worksheet are distinguishable by the shape of each maze. If you follow the correct paths the lines you drew will show an image within the maze for you to identify.

Procedure:

Help your students to visualize the paths of the mazes, which may be difficult for some. The path for the maze made of squares goes from an entry on the left to an exit on the right. The starburst maze involves getting from the center of the puzzle back to the center. Advise your students to be careful about marking on their worksheet unless they are certain it is the correct path, as extra lines may confuse the image. They may wish to use erasable pencil lines to work out the paths, and use colored pencils of different colors for their final paths. Alternately they could use a lighter colored pencil for their initial tries and darken the line with a different color when they have found the way. It will be easier for them to identify the shape if they fill in the areas enclosed by the correct paths through the two mazes.

Close

Can you identify the image in your mazes? (The image is the Ark of the Covenant. If your students cannot identify it give hints, like: “It is connected to the book of Joshua.” “It is something that the Hebrews had.” “It is something the Hebrews brought with them from Sinai.” “It is mentioned in today’s Bible passage.” You might also help them not be distracted by the overlap of the two mazes, but to try to view the overall shape.) **A big part of what was meant to happen while the Hebrews were in the wilderness between Egypt and the Promised Land is for them to understand better who God was and what God wanted. We couldn’t really draw a picture of God here, so we have an image of a symbol the Hebrews were given to represent God’s presence to them.** (You might have your students look at Exodus 37:1-9 to consider what the ark was like. They could also consider Numbers 7:89, which says that when God spoke with Moses the prophet heard the voice as coming from between the two cherubim on top of the ark.)

What things help people remember God today? Which of these things mean the most to you? Have a prayer thanking God for the guidance your students receive.

Go!

The Opinions Page

RESEARCH/CREATIVE WRITING

Materials: Worksheet “Somebody Needs to Do Something!”; writing utensils; concordances; Bibles; optional: chalkboard or marker board.



Quest Connection

When the Hebrews crossed the Jordan they were stepping into the backyard of the Amorite peoples in the Promised Land, and the Amorites weren’t very happy about it. Even before Moses had died the Hebrews defeated two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og, and took their land. This activity poses a “what if” situation of how news of the Hebrews’ arrival might have been portrayed, if there were a major newspaper in the Promised Land during Joshua’s time. In particular, what if they had letters to the editor? Your worksheet shows a letter to the editor sent by an Amorite and published in that newspaper. You will write a response to that letter, presenting the perspective of the Hebrew people.

Procedure: Read or paraphrase the Quest Connection comments for your students, then distribute the worksheets. Allow your students time to read the letter to the editor, or have it read aloud. Your students could have a period of collaborative work in which they brainstorm issues to address in their own response (which you could mark on the board). How you guide the discussion will depend in part on whether your students will be trying to complete their letters in class, or treating this activity as a take-home project. You might suggest to your students some issues they could look at in the Bible for ideas, including texts about God’s promises to Abraham, the experiences the Hebrews had with Sihon and Og, or the experiences that pushed the Hebrews to leave Egypt. Make concordances available so they can look up background information if they wish. Ask your students to consider such issues as why the Hebrews wanted a land of their own, whether they felt entitled to such a land or not, just who they were going to be displacing by moving into the area and how those people behaved, and God’s part in the situation.

For the actual writing of the responses you might set a word limit, stating that the editorial board of the paper restricts writers to 300 words or fewer. Or you could expand the student’s opportunity by saying that the newspaper has requested a guest editorial on the letter’s subject, allowed to run 1,000 words. (For comparison, the two paragraphs of this “Procedure” section use 260 words.)

Close

If your students complete their worksheets in class, invite one or more of them to read their work aloud to the class. If they will be finishing later, suggest that those who are willing to share their ideas bring their worksheets in next week. You can use them for a review time, or even create a bulletin board display of the ideas.

Close with a time of prayer, asking God to help your students to see clearly what God’s desires for this world are, and to lay claim to their part in those plans.

Go!**Don't Laugh at My Camel, He's Paid For!****Bumper Sticker History****ARTS AND CRAFTS**

Materials: Worksheet “Sites and Slogans”; markers and other writing utensils; optional: chalkboard or marker board; butcher paper.

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Tell your students: **The Bible tells us a lot about the history of the Hebrews in their exodus from Egypt, their time in Sinai, and their wandering in the wilderness. Now in this lesson that wilderness period is ending. The journey isn't exactly finished for the Hebrew people, but it was definitely a time of transition in which they may have been looking back on their collective experiences. Frequently people who have traveled widely collect bumper stickers and other tags related to where they have been and what they have seen and done. In this activity you will take some time to imagine and create stickers that could end up on the back of a camel in the Hebrews' camp. Have some fun with this.**

Procedure: You might accept brainstorming suggestions from your students and put them on a board to consider 1) places the Hebrews had been in the previous 40 years; 2) things the Hebrews had experienced; 3) bumper stickers and slogans that are common today, which could be morphed into hypothetical ancient counterparts. Encourage your students to be open to goofy ideas, but also to think about what really would be some of the significant features of the journey in the eyes of those who made it.

Close

If there is time, review some of your students' creations. If you have a willing artist in your class, create the rear of a camel on some butcher paper to go on the wall, and put some of your class favorites on it (perhaps have your class color the camel's fur, and then cut out new bumper sticker sized pieces of paper to attach to the image, to fill in.

Suggest that this week your students take time to think about how they want to look back on this time of their lives in later years (whether they define that period as High School, their youth, etc.).

Go!**Following the Leader****GAME**

Materials: Cotton gauze or a strip of some other white cloth, perhaps attached to a stick like a streamer; a small quantity of small items that can be collected off the floor – depending on the flooring you have use bird seed, rice, marbles, beads or something similar; some bowls or other containers; small cups; a pitcher full of water; dry crackers; note cards; writing instruments; optional: name tags, plastic snakes.

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The Hebrew people in the wilderness had pretty clear guidance on much of what they were meant to be doing. A pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire were right there to show that God was leading them; they had the ark of the covenant and the whole tabernacle system to define their worship; the prophet Moses relayed God’s instructions, including the entire Law; distinct guidelines told them how they were to get food and water, and where they would camp at night; they knew where they were going, where they had come from, and why they were where they were. It is rare to have that kind of direction.

We are going to be playing follow the leader, but not in the normal way. We are going to play a game of Follow the Leader that tries to symbolize some of the ways that the Hebrews were called to follow.

This game will both remind your students of all the ways that God directed and cared for the Hebrews in their wanderings, and catch them off guard so that they are reminded of the many occasions when the Hebrews got in trouble during their time of wandering. In reality this game may be more like “Simon Says” than “Follow the Leader,” but don’t give your students specific warnings that it is. But it isn’t exactly “Simon Says” either, since in this game *everything* that the leader says is to be done, and those who are judged disobedient are penalized even for some requirements that were never stated outright.

Procedure:**Set Up**

Decide in advance who the leader will be. If the leader is not you they may need some guidance in advance about how to work the game. You might want to narrate each step along the way from the sidelines. If you are not the leader you could more easily read scriptures aloud after or during each step in the game.

Go!

Your student-players will each represent a tribe or a half-tribe of Israel. Distribute name tags or note cards which specify who is who. Prepare those tags or cards in advance, including a name and a number indicating how many people from that tribe were counted in the census that starts Numbers. For easy reference a list of the tribes is included here, along with how many males over the age of 20 they had in the first census and the matching figure from the census taken when they were soon to leave the wilderness. Don't bring up that second figure when you assign tribes and numbers to your students, it will be addressed at the end of the game.

Reuben (46,500; 43,730)	Dan(62,700; 64,400)	The half-tribes
Simeon (59,300; 22,200)	Gad (45,650; 40,500)	(from Joseph's line):
Judah (74,600; 76,500)	Asher (41,500; 53,400)	Manasseh (32,200; 52,700)
Zebulum (57,400; 60,500)	Naphtali (53,400; 45,400)	Ephraim (40,5000; 32,500)
Issachar (54,400; 64,300)	Benjamin (35,400; 45,600)	

Levi was not counted among the warriors (see Numbers 1:47ff; 3:39; 26:62), instead we have figures on the males a month old or more, which first was 22,000 and rose to 23,000.

Arrange any props for your game stations in advance (perhaps do this activity in a different area than your classroom). For suggestions on props see the Materials list above. You may also wish to put information about each biblical event on a note card near the location for each prop, or keep it on your person to read aloud. One or two such cards would have to be kept on the leader's person for use when/if needed, because they will not relate to specific props. These cards may include a scripture reference, the name of the location, or a description of the event.

Stations for your game include the following (the sequence won't be the key thing, but the suggested sequence may work nicely): 1) everyone is offered a drink of water in a cup, poured from a pitcher by the leader; 2) collecting seeds or rice from the floor into bowls or other containers; 3) eating some crackers; 4) the leader is called away to leave the room for a while, perhaps one minute, and leaves someone else in charge.

Go!

Once your students have been assigned roles, tell them: **Our game will involve following the leader, who will show it is time to move by holding up their white streamer, which symbolizes the pillar of cloud going in front of the Hebrews. The leader will lower the gauze when it is time to stop.**

In the course of the game penalties will be issued to players – for the purposes of the game, even if no player transgresses a rule just arbitrarily state that some member of a tribe has done so and assign a penalty anyway. The penalties will take the form of the “smiting” of some number of the members of one or more tribes, perhaps simply stated as a percentage of the total they have or the total they started with. Do not give players warnings about what is to be expected of them, but when anyone’s tribe is smitten have them mark the reduction on their name tag or note card. Go ahead and smite multiple groups for the action of any one, as this is the pattern from the wilderness – the people were viewed as one group, and some of the penalties were general.

On the first time you do steps 1-3, no penalties are to be given. Part of the point of this sequence is that in Exodus 15, 16, 17 there were several conflicts over food and water, and there is no reference to the people dying in punishment for their complaints. But at Sinai, when they chose to worship a golden calf while Moses was away, God smote, and after that he began smiting more frequently. Once the people chose not to enter the land the first time the attrition of the earlier generation was the Lord’s stated policy. That may have affected the degree to which God punished the people, but in today’s activity there is no need to kill off all of the tribes (a certain number should be assumed to have died from age during the 40 years, and in any case you may not want to play the game long enough to realistically finish off the tribes).

When you do step four, have the leader leave the streamer in the room (as the cloud remained visible on Sinai during Moses’ absence). Once the leader returns cite Exodus 32:1, 25, 30-34. You do this whether or not the class got rowdy while the leader was away. But you do not remove anything from the totals, because they represent figures from just after these events. After having completed step 4, repeat steps 1-3 at least twice, but several times if desired. During subsequent rounds of steps 1-3 use the following ideas:

If a person turns down the dry cracker or the water, some portion of their tribe is to be smitten; the first time this happens cite Numbers 11:4-6, 31-34; on a later occasion you could cite Numbers 21:4-9 (the people complain about the food and God sends snakes to bite them – use your plastic snakes if you have them available). Use these verses even if your class does not eventually get tired of eating crackers, just declare that some portion of the camp objected.

Go!**Follow the Leader Cont.**

If during the course of the game anyone complains about the game (that it is difficult, or silly, etc.), you can pull out a note card citing Numbers 11:1-3 (about complaints in the camp of the Hebrews), and inform the player or players who are furthest from the leader that fire has just struck the outskirts of the camp.

If anyone expresses a desire to be the leader “next” or instead of the current leader they are to be smitten, and you can cite Numbers 16:1-3, 32-35 (some of the Levites, and members of other tribes, protest the division of labor)

If anyone objects to all the smiting, reference Numbers 16:41-50, then smite a few more students.

You can add other ideas to these if you wish, depending on what would work well for your group. If you have enough rounds of the game you might declare a Sabbath, and smite anyone who tries to collect the “manna” off the floor.

Finishing the Game

If you wish, declare to the students that your game is skipping to the end, decades later. Cite Numbers 25:1-3, 9; 26:1-4. (This is where idolatry entered the Hebrew camp once more, just before the second census was taken, as the result of Balaam’s scheming – if you wish to discuss this further with your class also see Numbers 31:8, 16).

In the course of the game penalties will have appeared to greatly reduce the sizes of the tribes which were noted on the name tags or note cards. Now that the game is ending you will need to point out the following: **You were all assigned numbers for your tribes. Those were the figures from the census taken in the second year the Hebrews were in the wilderness, before they left the area of Mount Sinai. It counted all their soldiers, the men age 20 and over. A second census was taken before the people entered the land. The total given for the first figures, in Numbers 1:46, is 603,550; the total in Numbers 26:51 is 601,730. They finished the trip with only 1,820 fewer soldiers than they started with.**

God’s concern was not that all of the people who set out from Egypt would survive their trip. In fact only two of them did. Do you remember who? (Caleb and Joshua) What God most wanted was for all those who *did* finally enter to be aware of God’s holiness and the demands of that holiness on their lives, and to understand and rely on God’s promises and the love that was behind them. (Have Numbers 14:26-31 read aloud.) God punished the people time after time in the wilderness, but during the same time God kept a nation of people provisioned with food and water in a wilderness, God gave them victory over enemy after enemy, and God taught them how to live righteous lives. Did playing this game give you any ideas about what the people who were entering the land in today’s story were like? (They were used to traveling, and familiar with hardships, they were careful to listen to God, they knew that God was there to provide for them.)

It is rare to receive the kind of guidance the Hebrews had in the wilderness. But during that same time the Hebrews received a lot of punishments for how they behaved. Sometimes they acted like God didn't intend for them to have what they needed, sometimes they decided to substitute things they could see for the God they could not see, they go in trouble for wanting any easier way, and also for wanting more responsibility or prestige than God had chose to give them – in general we're talking about them wanting to do things their own way. God had to bring them out of those attitudes into a way of living that would allow them to enter the land.

As much direct guidance as the Hebrews had, this was not the ultimate way for God to show people how to serve. Jesus provided that – even for us, who are not witnesses to his ministry on earth but only can hear from others who experienced it first hand.

Do you think that when the Hebrews were preparing to cross the Jordan they were nervous about leaving behind the way they had been living for forty years? (Maybe; they had no experience with farming, they didn't really know what settling down was going to be like. And then there were the battles to be fought in the meantime.) **What features of that time do you think the Hebrews would have had a hard time visualizing as changing when they were across the river?** (They had lived as close neighbors for decades, soon they were going to be spread over the countryside; they were going to live in one place, not travel around; already they didn't have Moses anymore to lead them, they had Joshua but once they were settled they would have no national leaders – until the time of Saul.)

Jesus is now our leader. Do you ever find it difficult to remember that he is directing you? (Probably the answer will be “yes”; your students may raise specifics on times when this is hard to remember, but the basic point is for them to acknowledge it is true.) **What can help you remember Jesus when you are in danger of going astray?** (They might suggest their “WWJD?” bracelet; their Christian friends; recalling a Bible verse or a biblical character; hearing some worshipful music; the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Probably every suggestion your students make can be validated by you, and you can invite the students to try ideas that the others brought up. You might want to point in particular to the guidance of the Spirit that we can have as Christian disciples. You could even bring up the story of Eldad and Medad, they prophesied to the people in the Hebrew camp and Moses declared that he wished God would put the Spirit on all of God's people – Num. 11:23-30. At Pentecost the pouring out of the Spirit on all of God's servants finally took place, and we can rejoice that it did.)

Close with prayer, thanking God for guidance, and for mercy.

So What's Your River?

Like the Hebrews with the Jordan, we all have barriers to overcome. Moments in anyone's life will stand out as times of transition. These may be looked at positively or negatively, seen as transitions out of an old way of living, into a new way of life, through a great trial, or in any number of other ways. For your own benefit use this worksheet to describe rivers you have faced and how you dealt with them, and perhaps a river you are facing now.

What are some rivers that you have crossed in the past? Did you face them alone, or were you accompanied on the trips?

What river from your past stands out to you the most clearly today, and why?

How do you plan for a river crossing? (Maybe you discuss it with your friends, read up on the situation, talk to your parents about it, or pray.)

How do you feel when you know you have a river to deal with? (Excited? Nervous? Mopey?)

Have you ever prepared yourself for a river crossing and then ended up keeping your feet dry when you expected to be soaked? (If so, how did that happen?)

If you are actively crossing a river now, or expecting to be dealing with one of these river crossings soon, are you getting help with that crossing from your friends? _____

From your family? _____ From God? _____ In what ways are you being helped? _____

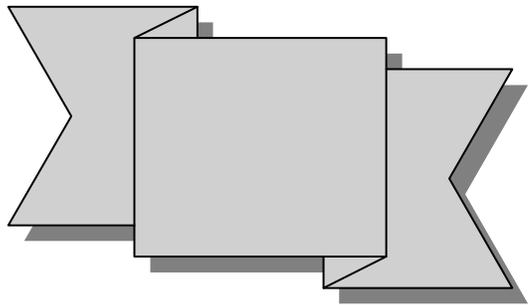
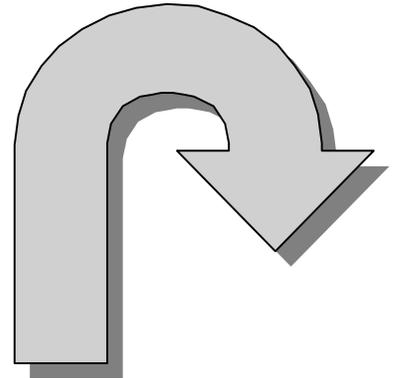
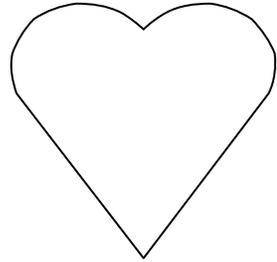
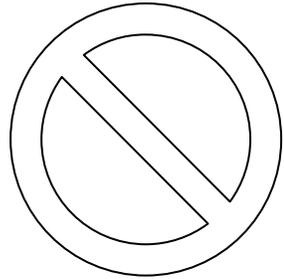
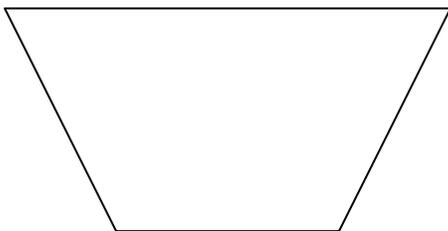
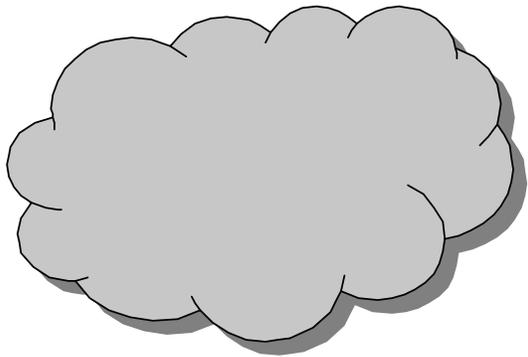
Hidden Image

Trace the three paths in the three overlapping mazes below to find the hidden image.

Sites and Slogans



Congratulations! Your family's forty years in the wilderness have finally come to an end. It is time to consider where you have been. It has been interesting, but it hasn't always been fun. Your parents blew the family fortune on a golden calf and what did you get from them? A camel. Design some bumper stickers for your ride to show the new neighborhood what kind of life you've been leading.



Answer key to Hidden image