

# Follow that Ark!



## Topic

God's leading

## Theme

God directs His people to accomplish His purposes.

## Desired Learner Response

The learner will determine whether he is following God or if he expects God to follow him.

## Materials

- Resources 1 and 7

## Scripture Focus

Joshua 3–5:12

## Summary

God led Israel to the Jordan and then parted the water for their crossing. Israel set up a memorial to the event to instruct further generations concerning God's power on their behalf and His presence with them. God then reinstituted circumcision as the sign of His covenant relationship with Israel. In the land, Israel celebrated Passover and enjoyed the fruit of the land.

## Outline

### I. Israel Set out after God (3)

- A. Directions for the crossing (3:1–4)
- B. Dedication before the crossing (3:5, 6)
- C. Demonstrations at the crossing (3:7–17)

### II. Israel Set up a Memorial to God (4)

- A. Instructions for the memorial (4:1–5)
- B. Importance of the memorial (4:6–5:1)

### III. Israel Submitted to God (5:2–12)

- A. Reinstitution of the sign of the covenant (5:2–9)
- B. Renewal of the Passover celebration (5:10)
- C. Realization of the blessings of Canaan (5:11, 12)

## Memory Verse

*"For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, . . . That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever" (Joshua 4:23a, 24).*

## GETTING STARTED

### Israel's Direct Report

**ASK:** In the jobs you've held, what was the more important piece of information on your job description, the list of duties or the designation of the person you reported to? Explain. (Q1)

**ASK:** How might your job performance be different if your job description said you report to yourself? (Q2)

God made it clear to the Israelites that they ultimately reported to Him. He miraculously led them into the Promised Land so they would understand for generations to come that they existed for God's purposes and not the other way around.

### What's Your Motivation?

**ASK:** What are some examples of things you would never do while on the job lest you be found to be insubordinate or lazy?

**ASK:** Who or what motivates you to work hard while on the job?

God made it clear to the Israelites that they ultimately reported to Him. Based on how He got them into the Promised Land, they were to find His leadership highly motivating

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

### I. Israel Set out after God (3)

#### A. Directions for the crossing (3:1-4)

Joshua and the children of Israel went from Shittim (Acacia Grove) to the banks of the Jordan where they lodged (3:1). Joshua led the children of Israel in this change of location, leaving early in the morning to make the ten or so mile trip. Most likely they walked for a good part of the day. This was an important move for it brought Israel to the edge of the Promised Land and to a barrier that would hinder their entrance into the land. In reality, this was as far as Joshua could lead God's people without direct intervention from God. Joshua could not overcome the flooded Jordan, a troubling barrier to progress, on his own.

The last time the Israelites faced a troubling barrier was at the Red Sea soon after God led them out of Egypt (Exod. 14). At that time, they needed to get away from the oncoming Egyptian army. God demonstrated that Israel could trust Him as their leader when He parted the Red Sea for them and then destroyed Pharaoh's army with the returning waters. The flooded Jordan River was different. It kept Israel from getting *to* their destination. And they weren't fleeing an army but rather preparing to start a war. God was about to use the Jordan River to demonstrate once again that He is Israel's trusted leader.



**ASK:** What differences would you expect between Israel's mood at the Red Sea and their mood at the Jordan River? (Q3) *At the Red Sea they would have had desperation and fear because of the immediate threat but at the Jordan they would have had excitement and anticipation because of God's promises.*

In order to prepare the people to follow the Lord, Joshua sent God's instructions through his typical chain of command (3:2).

**READ:** Joshua 3:3. **ASK:** Who or what were the people to follow? (Q4) *They were to specifically follow the ark.*

The fact that the priests were carrying the ark was actually deemphasized in Joshua's instructions. They played a secondary role in guiding the people into the Promised Land. They simply followed God's step by step instructions on where to take the ark and when.

The people rightly understood the ark to be the symbol of God's presence with Israel. He dwelt between the cherubim on the mercy seat which sat on the top of the ark. They knew that to follow the ark was to follow God.

**READ:** Joshua 3:4. **ASK:** Why were the people not supposed to go near the ark? (Q5) *Because they didn't know the way. The ark had to stay in clear view so everyone would know which way to go.*

God wanted the people to stay behind the ark about a thousand yards or so. The people were not to overtake the ark or even to crowd up to it. God wanted it to be absolutely clear that He was leading His people into the Promised Land.

There is also the sense in which the ark was holy because of God's presence with it. The people were to always respect God's holiness. Staying back showed that though God was with them, they were not equal with God.

## **B. Dedication before the crossing (3:5, 6)**

The Canaanites worshiped false gods that in their minds existed to fulfill their desires. Consequently, they used their gods to try to accomplish their selfish purposes; they sought to appease them with sacrifices and rituals in order to get what they wanted. Israel's relationship with the one true God was far different. Israel existed to serve God's purpose, but God did not exist to bow to any selfish or sinful desires Israel might have. With that understanding in mind, Joshua told the people to sanctify themselves in preparation for crossing into the Promised Land (3:5). Israel's sanctification process often included washing of one's clothes and body as symbols of one's separation to God (cf. Exod. 19:14, 15). Israel sanctified themselves to set themselves apart to God and His purpose. Ultimately God's purpose, particularly in the Promised Land, was to bring glory to Himself as He showered His grace on His people.

**ASK:** Why was it important for Israel to know that they existed for God's glory? (Q6) *So they might seek to know God's purposes and walk in His ways.*

**ASK:** What might have been some consequences if Israel believed that God

*existed for their purposes? (Q7) Israel would have seen God as Someone to manipulate. They would have not sought to truly know God and His ways. They would have been chastened by God for their selfish existence.*

Israel was to set themselves apart for the miracle-working God. They would soon witness His power on their behalf and for His glory as they set out after God (Josh. 3:5, 6).

### **C. Demonstrations at the crossing (3:7–17)**

Besides His glory, God had two other goals in mind as He led Israel to the Jordan and into the Promised Land. First, He would begin to *magnify Joshua in the sight of all Israel* so they would know that God was with Him just as He was with Moses (3:7). The tribes had already begun to recognize importance of God's presence with Joshua. They prayed God's presence would be with Joshua after he confronted the tribes who settled east of the Jordan about joining the rest of Israel in the conquest (1:17). God would make it certain they knew their prayer was answered.

God went on to give His instructions for the Jordan crossing to Joshua (3:8). The priests carrying the ark were to come to the Jordan and stand in it. So far that wasn't much of a solution for getting across the flooded river. Joshua called the people to listen to God's plan (3:9). God then finally revealed how the people would cross the Jordan. But before Joshua gave the details, he relayed God's message that the Jordan crossing would accomplish His second goal. Namely, the people would know that the living God was with them and that He would without fail drive out the inhabitants of the Promised Land (3:10). That would be obvious when the ark moved forward and God, *the Lord of all the earth*, caused the priests' feet to cut off the Jordan River so the people could cross on dry land (3:11–13).

The two references to God as the *living God* and the *Lord of all the earth* were highly significant for Israel as they drew near to the Promised Land.

**READ:** Joshua 3:10. **ASK:** Why would the reference to God as the living God be important to Israel as they approached the Promised Land? (Q8) *They were about to invade a land filled with people who worshiped lifeless idols of wood and stone. Only they had the God Who is alive on their side.*

**READ:** Joshua 3:11. **ASK:** Why would the reference to God as the Lord of all the earth be important to Israel as they approached the Promised Land? (Q9) *There was much land to conquer, but it all already belonged to the Lord. It was His to give to them.*

God's plan unfolded just as He said it would. The priests stepped into the Jordan and onto dry land as the waters from the north piled up about twenty-five miles upstream at Adam and the waters to the south were cut off. All of Israel then crossed the Jordan on dry ground (3:14–17).

### **II. Israel Set up a Memorial to God (4)**

God made it obvious that He was leading Israel into the Promised Land. The ark, the symbol of His presence with Israel, went to the bank of the Jordan River first. He led them as the living God and the Lord of all the earth. The names of the

priests carrying the ark, however, remained unknown and are completely insignificant to the crossing narrative. But God's presence with Israel was highly significant. His presence and display of power were worth memorializing. The Lord made sure that happened.

### **A. Instructions for the memorial (4:1–5)**

The Lord gave Joshua instructions for building a memorial. Each of the twelve men he identified before the Jordan crossing (3:12) was to grab a large stone from the middle of the river and carry it on his shoulder to Gilgal, Israel's lodging place their first night in the Promised Land (4:1–5). The men were to arrange the stones, probably either in a heap on in a circle, as a memorial to what God did for them in bringing them to the Promised Land.

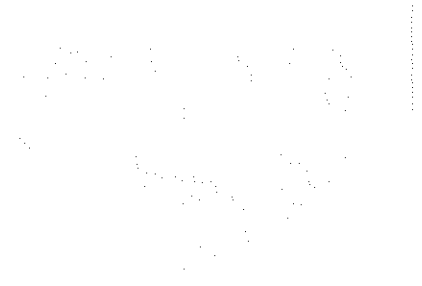
### **B. Importance of the memorial (4:6–5:1)**

The sight of the memorial in Gilgal would generate questions in generations to come. When children asked their fathers what the memorial meant, they would have an opportunity to tell their children about God's faithfulness to Israel in cutting off the Jordan River (4:6, 7). This instructional process was to continue as long as Israel was in the land so generations to come would learn to respect God.

Joshua went a step further, probably at the request of God, and set up another memorial in the middle of the Jordan before the waters returned to their place (4:9). No one would be able to see the memorial except God, but future generations could talk of it. No doubt it would cause them a great deal of wonder to consider the power it would take to cut off the Jordan River.

The memorial demonstrated how important it was for all of the tribes to be represented in the Jordan crossing. God wanted some from every tribe to make the crossing so every tribe could participate in the building of the memorial and so they would be personally aware of God's power and presence on their behalf. The passage makes a point to note that men from Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh crossed into the Promised Land (4:10–13).

As God had promised, He exalted Joshua (3:7; 4:14). The people knew God was with him and that Joshua communicated God's instructions to them. Joshua did exactly that as soon as the waters returned and the people made their way to Gilgal (4:15–19). Joshua rehearsed the need to speak to future generations about the meaning of the memorial (4:20–23). Joshua added that the memorial represented not only God's parting of the Jordan, but also all the events God did for Israel starting with the plagues in Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea. The memorial was meant as a testimony to God's power on behalf of Israel and to His presence with them. The stones were to encourage the *world* to recognize the Lord's mighty hand. God chose Israel as a means of communicating His glory, including His power, grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love. So God meant for His work on behalf of Israel to be a means of reaching the world (4:24). And the world was indeed watching. The hearts of the Canaanites in the land melted when they heard what God did for Israel (5:1). Unfortunately, their fear did not move them to repentance. They still rejected God and therefore remained ripe for judgment.





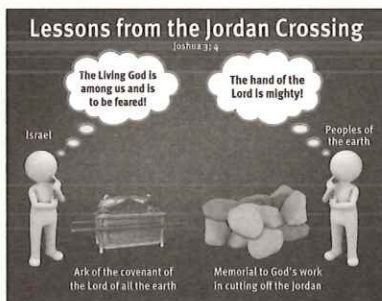
**READ:** Joshua 4:24. **ASK:** What affect was the memorial to have on Israel? (Q10) *It was supposed to cause them to fear the Lord their God forever.*

Gilgal became Israel's home base from which they launched military attacks and supplied their army. It therefore also served as a retreat where the soldiers would be reunited with their families and refreshed.

**ASK:** How might the sight of the twelve stones from the Jordan affect Israel's army as they left for battle? (Q11) *They would be encouraged to go to battle knowing that God was leading them and was with them.*

**ASK:** How might the memorial affect the soldiers' family members as the army went to battle? (Q12) *The soldiers' families could rest in God's almighty power to protect the soldiers.*

**RESOURCE:** Display resource 7 to summarize the lessons from the Jordan crossing.



### III. Israel Submitted to God (5:2–12)

#### A. Reinstitution of the sign of the covenant (5:2–9)

Once in the land, God instructed Joshua to reinstitute circumcision, the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant (5:2). This was an important command to follow for anyone not circumcised was in violation of the Covenant (Gen. 17:7–14). That was certainly the case for much of Israel, for all males who were born after Israel left Egypt had not been circumcised (Josh. 5:3–6). Israel needed to carry out the circumcisions in order to rightfully claim the Covenant. Since the Abrahamic Covenant was so closely tied to the Promised Land (15:17–21), it made sense for God to reinstate it once Israel was in the land.

God had previously called for the reinstitution of the covenant sign when He confronted Moses and sought to kill him if Moses did not circumcise his son (Exod. 4:24, 25). Moses' wife, Zipporah, reluctantly did the deed herself while God detained Moses. That intense personal confrontation communicated the importance of the sign. God demanded His people be personally identified with His Covenant with them. They were for Him. Circumcision was a matter of faith in God and obedience to Him. Being circumcised showed Israel served God's purposes and were dependent on Him.

Israel obeyed God and circumcised the generations that had been born during the wilderness wanderings (Josh. 5:7, 8). The fact that circumcision made them vulnerable to attack for several days was not a problem for God. God made Israel's enemies afraid of them. The enemies didn't even leave their cities for fear of being killed by Israel's God.

Israel's presence in the land as God's people signaled the rolling away of the *reproach of Egypt* (5:9). This *reproach* was probably the ridicule the Egyptians gave Israel for not taking the Promised Land at Kadesh Barnea nearly four decades earlier. From Egypt's perspective, it appeared as if wandering in the wilderness was

the best God could do for Israel. But that ridicule ended. God's people were in the land fulfilling what God intended for them since before He even called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans.

### **B. Renewal of the Passover celebration (5:10)**

Reinstituting of the sign of the Covenant paved the way for renewal of Israel's Passover celebration. According to Israel's ceremonial law, no uncircumcised male was allowed to participate in the Passover feast. The Passover celebration was a vivid reminder of the grace God showed to Israel in providing a lamb to serve as a substitute when the death angel passed through the camp on the night of the tenth plague in Egypt (Exod. 12). Israel owed God a debt of gratitude for that night of deliverance. He provided them with a substitute and allowed their firstborns to live.

**ASK:** How would the renewal of the Passover celebration affect Israel's understanding of their relationship with God in the Promised Land? (Q13) *It would renew their sense of belonging to God.*

### **C. Realization of the blessings of Canaan (5:11, 12)**

Once in the land, the manna ceased, and the people ate some of the grain around them, their first meal in the Promised Land (Josh. 5:11, 12). While it might have seemed like Israel was eating the Canaanites' grain, it was actually Israel's grain that the Canaanites were eating. The Israelites could have rightfully said, *This is our grain from our God. Look what our God did for us in making us His people!*

**ASK:** What regrets might the Israelites have had as they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan for the first time? (Q14) *That their parents and grandparents rejected God and the Promised Land nearly four decades earlier. That they ever complained to God about His care for them.*

Being God's people was a tremendous blessing for Israel. Eating the fruit of the land was in a way their first *taste* of victory!

## **MAKING IT PERSONAL**

### **We Exist for God**

God's program for this age is the church. As part of God's church, it is important for us to realize that we exist for His purposes. God is not our Santa Claus in the sky when we want something badly nor just a 911 operator to rescue us when we get in a pinch.

**ASK:** Do you recognize the fact that you exist for God's purposes and plan? Explain. (Q15)

**ASK:** What might be some characteristics of the person who thinks God exists for his own purposes? (Q16) *He prays only when he is in trouble or wants*



*something badly. He gets frustrated at God when things don't go his way. He gives little or no attention to ministering to others.*

Our mindset should be one of devotion to God. Encourage your learners to live beyond just trying to be a good person who doesn't offend God. God has much more in store for all of us if we will be sensitive and submissive to His leading.

### God Gives Grace

While Israel existed for God's purposes, that didn't mean their lives would be hard and distasteful. God's purposes for them included lots of grace and blessings. His purposes included abundant *giving*. God leads us by His grace today to. The most blessed life is lived in the center of God's will.

**ASK:** What do you fear you might lose or have to give up if you decided to follow God with all your heart? (Q17)

God's greatest blessings for us now are the joy and peace that come as we follow Him. But the greatest blessings of all still lay ahead of us. Being able to enjoy Heaven in God's presence forever is an indescribable measure of God's grace.

**ASK:** What are you looking forward to enjoying in Heaven? (Q18)

● God's Faithfulness

1.	8.
2.	9.
3.	10.
4.	11.
5.	12.
6.	13.
7.	

### Summary and Memory Verses

**RESOURCE:** Display resource 1. Add the following statement about God's faithfulness: God faithfully leads us by His grace.

Encourage learners to memorize Joshua 4:23 and 24. Give them an opportunity to say the verses in class next week.