

Living the Word:

Teaching Youth God's Story

Narrative Lectionary, Year 3

The Israelites Forget God's Promise

Exodus 32:1-14

Lesson #3-5

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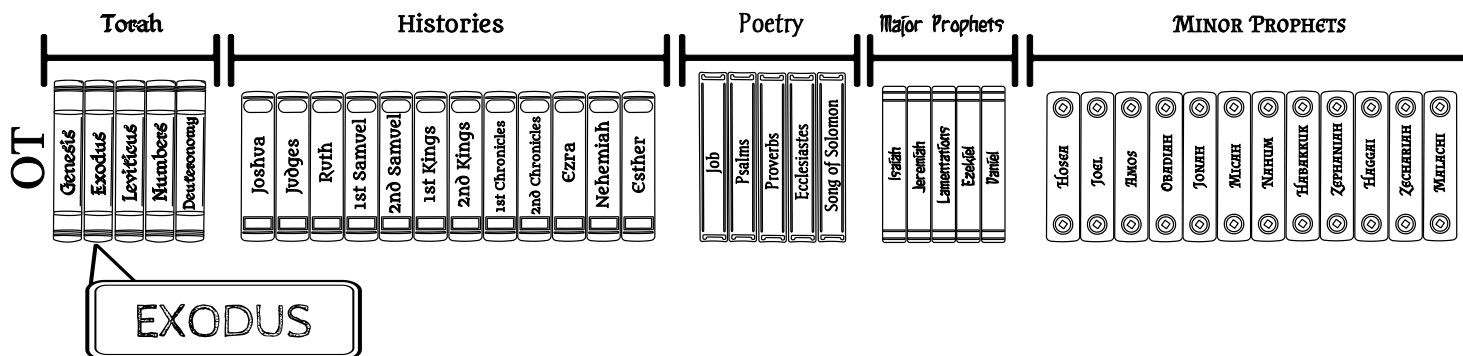
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The Israelites Forget God's Promise

Exodus 32:1-14

When the Israelites grow impatient, they turn their backs on God and decide to take matters into their own hands.

Story Connections

Last week we read about how the Israelites prepared to leave Egypt at God's command, and remembered their deliverance at the Passover celebration. This week the Israelites grow restless and create an idol to worship.

Story Summary

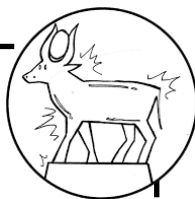
The Israelites Forget God's Promise

The Israelites grow impatient with Moses' leadership and with the wilderness and decide to create an idol to worship that looks a lot like the pagan idols so commonplace at the time. The Israelites make sacrifices before

their new idol, a golden calf, and bow down before it in worship, claiming that this "god" was the one to bring them out of Egypt. Seeing this, God becomes angry, tells Moses what the people are up to, and pledges to destroy them. Moses pleads with God on behalf of the people, and God relents from the people's destruction.

Lesson @ A Glance

#3-5: The Israelites Forget God's Promise
Exodus 32:1-14



The Point: Even when God's people rebel and turn away and worship a cow, God remembers God's promises and welcomes them back.

Making Connections: Promises Made, Promises Broken

Spiritual Practice: Worship

Bible Nuts and Bolts: The Torah

The Point

Even when God's people rebel and turn away and worship a cow, God remembers God's promises and welcomes them back. Today's story tells us that God sticks by us no matter what.

The Lord said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'"
Exodus 32:7-8

There is nothing we can ever do to separate ourselves from the unconditional love of God!

Bible Nuts & Bolts: The Torah

The term "Torah" is a Hebrew term that often refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. However, it also has a wider meaning related to teaching. It can refer to the Ten Commandments given at Mount Sinai, to a single commandment, or to instruction in the law. Perhaps one of the best ways to understand the complex meaning

of Torah is to read Psalm 119, which celebrates God's teaching by using a variety of words such as law, word or words, testimonies, and commandments.

For Your Reflection:

1. *Thinking of your own faith journey, when is a time when you created your own version of the golden calf?*
2. *When is a time when someone interceded on your behalf?*
3. *How might youths today be especially in need of someone interceding for them? How could you help them ask?*

Spiritual Practice: Worship

Worship reminds us of who God is and what God has done for us. When we worship, we remember God's promises to us. In turn we offer God our praise, adoration, and, really, our lives.

Overview, Objectives, and Materials You'll Need

Short on time?
Items marked +
can be adjusted to be done with
what you probably already
have in your pocket or
classroom.

Core Elements

+Into the Story

10 min. › None

Remembering Matters

Listen to, recall, and retell a story.

+Learning the Story 15 min.

› Bibles
› Highlighters and pens

The People Turn Away

Identify key words to connect with the story.

Living the Story 15 min.

› Activity Sheet #3-5.A and B

Turning Back to God

*Walk a finger prayer labyrinth to remember
and confess times we have turned from God.*

+Sending the Story 5 min.

› None

Extending the Learning:

Hands On <i>God's Top Ten</i> Create a list of commandments using Hebrew numerals.	20 min.	› Activity Sheet #3-5.C › Blank postcards › Drawing or calligraphy markers
+Mixed Media <i>Remember Your People</i> Listen to a song about how God remembers God's people and promises.	10 min.	› Video player
+The Competitive Edge <i>Fortunately, a Cow...</i> Play a game in which cows feature as the heroes.	10 min.	› None
Simply Serving <i>Becoming Intercessors</i> Learn about refugees and commit to prayer for a group of people.	20 min.	› Video player › Optional: world map
+Worship Connection <i>Intercessory Prayer Group</i> Pray for congregation members in need.	20 min.	› Prayer requests/petitions from church bulletin

Into the Story:

Remembering Matters (10 minutes)

Listen to, recall, and retell a story.

DURING CLASS:

Supplies:

› Nothing

1. To warm up for today's story I am going to tell you another story. Actually, I will be telling half of you a story, and that half will then tell the other half that same story. Finally, that second half will tell the story back to me. Sound confusing? Don't worry. It will make sense as we begin!
2. Divide the group in half. Instruct the second half to leave the room and wait elsewhere so they don't overhear the story being told.
3. Read the following story to the remaining half:
 - **Caroline, a sophomore at Rosemont High, was hoping to join the cross-country team at school in the fall. To prepare, she was following a training schedule over the summer. She would run three miles on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays, and five miles on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Sundays and Thursdays were her rest days. Some days she would run on the road, on sidewalks and pavement, but once in a while she would run on the dirt trail behind her backyard. Most days she ran in the morning when it was still cool, because the afternoons were quite hot. Fortunately, the trail behind her house went through a forest filled with oak, cedar, and poplar trees. The shade helped keep things cool. One day on a trail run it started to rain. Caroline had not brought a hat and was not wearing any rain gear. She was drenched by the time she made it home and consequently caught a cold. With only a couple of days before try-outs, Caroline was worried the cold would affect her chances of making the team. Fortunately, with some extra rest, extra fluids, and extra vitamin C, Caroline was able to recover enough to make try-outs, and it was the happiest day in her life when she found out she made the team.**
4. After the story, bring the other group back in and have youths pair up so each pair contains one person who has heard the story and one who hasn't. If there is an odd number of youths you can have one group of three. Have pairs spread out so other pairs will not overhear their story telling and tell the youths who have heard the story to tell their partner the same story.
5. When pairs have completed this, invite the youths from the second group to collectively tell you the story they just heard. Make note of any details they missed from (or added to!) the original story. Compare this third rendition to the original.
6. **As you can see, it can be difficult to remember the details sometimes but often the message, or main point, sticks in our minds. Today's scripture story is about when the Israelites forgot the main point: that the one true God saved them and would provide for them.**

Learning the Story:

The People Turn Aside (15 min.)

Identify key words to connect with the story.

DURING CLASS:

1. Today's story begins in the middle of Moses' 40 days and nights on Mt. Sinai with the Lord. The Israelites were camped below and had grown impatient with their leaders and with God. Not a lot of time had passed since their Exodus from Egypt but they were already starting to turn from the God who had saved them.
2. Open your Bibles to Exodus 32:1-14. As we read through the passage keep a look out for the words "gold," "burn," "turn," and "stars." When these words come up it is your job to shout out a phrase:
 - Gold: "Bling bling!"
 - Burn or burnt: "Ouch! Hot!"
 - Turn: "Turn, baby, turn!"
 - Stars: "Twinkle, twinkle!"

Supplies:

- › Bibles
- › Highlighters or pens

You could also ask youths to come up with their own phrases for these four words.

3. Invite a volunteer (or several) to read the passage out loud for the group. After reading, ask: **What is one thing that stands out to you from this story? What is a question you have after hearing it?** Allow time for youths to reflect and ask questions.
4. Read the passage a second time through, giving youths an opportunity to hear the story again.
5. **Why do you think we focused on those four words (gold, burn, turn, and stars)? What is the significance of each word in the story?** *[Gold represents wealth and success; the Israelites wanted to worship a god that represented the kind of power they saw from other cultural gods. Burnt offerings were customary and even sanctioned by God—it was a way to show reverence and penance; the Israelites' burnt offerings to the golden idol showed that they had turned away from the one true God. Turning away from God is a recurring theme throughout Israel's narrative, and our own; we turn away from God whenever we think we know better, when we stop trusting God. We can also turn back towards God, who has never left us and will never leave us. God promised Abraham his descendants would be more numerous than the stars—even though God became angered by the Israelites, God was reminded of God's promise to Abraham.]*

6. **Look at verse 13. Remember back when God made these promises to Abraham? Look up and read Genesis 17:1-8 and Genesis 22:15-18.** Have youths highlight or circle the parts where God promises to multiply Abraham's descendants and lead them to a land of prosperity. **Even though the Israelites, Abraham's descendants, had turned away from God, God did not turn away from them. Despite their infidelity, God sticks with them and keeps God's promise to lead them to the Promised Land.**
7. **How is God's faithfulness to the Israelites in spite of their betrayal different than what we see in our world today? Is it common or uncommon for people to keep their promises? How is God's faithfulness to us counter-cultural?**

Living the Story:

Turning Back to God (15 minutes)

Walk a finger prayer labyrinth to remember and confess times we have turned from God.

BEFORE CLASS:

1. Makes copies of Activity Sheets #3-5.A and B for each youth.

Supplies:

› Activity Sheets #3-5.A and B

DURING CLASS:

1. A prayer labyrinth gives us the opportunity to be still and reflect on our own faith journey, as well as focus on God's word through scripture. Today we are going to go on our own journeys of reflection, confession, centering, and returning using prayer labyrinths. Hand out the activity sheets.
2. As you can see, a labyrinth looks like a maze. However, while a maze is designed to trick and confuse its users, a labyrinth is designed to bring users to its center. There is only one path in a labyrinth. We will use our fingers to trace our path through the labyrinth while focusing on prayer and scripture.
3. Invite youths to open their Bibles to Jeremiah 29:10-11. **God used the prophet Jeremiah to speak to the Israelites hundreds of years after our story from today took place. Not surprisingly, the Israelites made a pattern out of turning away from God. Their nation was overtaken by Babylon, and Judeans, the people from the land of Judah, were sent into exile. But God did not abandon them. God still remembered God's promise to them. During your labyrinth prayer you'll be asked to read this passage of scripture. When you do, think about how God has kept his promise to the Israelites and how God is keeping God's promise to be present and providential in your own life.**
4. Invite youths to begin their labyrinth reflection using the activity pages. When each youth is finished, close by taking a collective breath (slow inhale and exhale) and say "Amen" together.

Hands On: God's Top Ten (20 minutes.)

Create a list of commandments using Hebrew numerals.

BEFORE CLASS:

1. Make copies of Activity Sheet #3-5.C for each youth, or at least enough to share.

Supplies:

- › Activity Sheet #3-5.C
- › Blank postcards
- › Drawing or calligraphy markers

DURING CLASS:

1. **Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments when the Israelites grew impatient and constructed the golden calf. How many of the commandments can you name?** Use Exodus 20 as a reference and offer help if youths need reminders. *[1. Have no other gods. 2. Do not take the Lord's name in vain. 3. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. 4. Honor your father and mother. 5. Do not kill. 6. Do not commit adultery. 7. Do not steal. 8. Do not lie. 9. Do not covet your neighbor's house. 10. Do not covet your neighbor's wife, livestock, servants, or anything belonging to your neighbor.]*
2. **Using drawing or calligraphy markers, we will learn the Hebrew numerals one to ten and then write out the Ten Commandments next to each numeral on these cardstock postcards. You can keep the postcards in your Bibles as reminders of God's life-giving law.**
3. Hand out calligraphy markers, postcards, and copies of Hebrew numbers.

Mixed Media:

Remember Your People (10 minutes)

Listen to a song about how God remembers God's people and promises.

BEFORE CLASS:

1. Cue up the music video of Matt Maher singing "Your Grace is Enough" Acoustic: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kvw6SkZ4cGI>.

Supplies

› Video player

DURING CLASS:

1. **We are going to watch a music video. While we do, listen for words that echo back to our story from today. In particular, listen for the call for God to remember God's promises and God's people! Play the music video.**
2. **What words or phrases from the song did you identify that reminded you of today's story?** [*"Remember your people, remember your promise, remember your people, O God;" youths may identify others.*] **What about those words/phrases echoed today's story? How does this song remind you of God's faithfulness? What does it mean that God's grace is enough?**

The Competitive Edge:

Fortunately, a Cow... (10 minutes)

Play a game in which cows feature as the heroes.

Supplies:

› Nothing

DURING CLASS:

1. **Today's passage, in which the Israelites worship a calf, may strike you as odd or even funny. The Scriptures themselves point out the absurdity of idol worship (Isaiah 44: 9-20 and Elijah on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20-39) are both good examples.) Continuing with the silliness, we are going to play a silly game where cows are the heroes!**
2. Divide youths into small groups. One group will act out a dire situation, such as a boat capsizing or a horse running away, which ends in the words "fortunately, a cow..." Another group will need to act out their ideas for how a cow could be the hero in this awful situation and save the day. After a few rounds, give youths the chance to vote on the cow stories they thought were most hilarious.

Simply Serving:

Becoming Intercessors (20 minutes)

Learn about refugees and commit to pray for a group of people.

BEFORE CLASS:

1. Cue up the video from <http://www.worldvision.org/news-stories-videos/refugee-videos-south-sudan-syria>.
2. Research the Syrian refugee crisis here: <http://www.worldvision.org/wv/news/Syria-war-refugee-crisis-FAQ> and prepare factsheets with basic information for youths, highlighting specific needs for prayer.

Supplies

- › Video player
- › Optional: world map

DURING CLASS:

1. **What do you know about refugees?** Invite youths to share what they know or have heard about refugees and refugee crises around the world. **Today we are going to learn about an organization called World Vision and their work with refugees. This video highlights refugees from the Sudan and Syria.** If you have a world map available, identify for youths the locations of the Sudan and Syria.
2. Show the video to the group. Ask youths for their reactions: **What is something that surprised you? What is something that made you sad? What is something that inspires in you a desire to help?**
3. Pass out the factsheets you prepared before class. **Take a look at the information on this sheet. What are some ways that we as a group can help people in crises such as these?** Give youths time to read and to brainstorm ways to help, leading them to think about prayer as a means of service if they do not offer the idea themselves.
4. **The word “intercede” means to intervene or to ask for something on behalf of someone else. This is what Moses does in the story when he asks God to remember God’s promise and not destroy Israel. When we pray for someone else, we are interceding for them. You will sometimes hear this kind of prayer referred to as intercessory prayer. You can see on your handouts that refugees have a multitude of needs. Each one of us is going to pick one specific need and commit to pray for that need every day this week.**
5. Invite youths to choose a refugee need to pray for in the coming week. Examples are: clean water, safe and secure housing, enough food, access to medical care, job opportunities, countries to take in and resettle refugees, access to education, etc.

Worship Connection:

Intercessory Prayer (10 minutes)

Pray for congregation members in need.

BEFORE CLASS:

1. Provide copies of your congregation's prayer list or petitions used in worship/found in a bulletin.

Supplies

- › Prayer requests/petitions from church bulletin

DURING CLASS:

1. **During worship we act as intercessors every time we pray for the needs of others. Coming together and joining our hearts and voices in prayer for the needs of our members, family, and friends, our community, and our world is an important act of worship. By doing this, we raise our concerns to God and can be confident God hears us, just as God heard Moses intercede for the Israelites on Mount Sinai.**
2. **Pass out copies of the bulletin/prayer list. Read through this list of prayer petitions. Select a prayer concern you would like to pray for this morning. We will go around the group, each praying for our chosen petition.** Give youths time to read and select a prayer petition. Go around the group and ask youths to share which petition they have chosen to eliminate any repeats during the prayer. **Think of a one-sentence prayer you can offer for this need. I will start our prayer time, and we will go around the room for each of you to offer your short prayer. When you have finished your prayer, end with "God of mercy," and as a group we will respond with, "hear our prayer."** Check that everyone is ready, and then begin the prayer.
3. **Dear God, thank you for listening to us when we intercede for others the way you listened to Moses when he interceded for the Israelites and reminded you of your promise to Abraham and Israel. Hear us now as we pray for the needs of our family, friends, and neighbors, our community, and our world...**
4. When all youths have had a chance to pray, close the prayer with a simple "Amen."

Sending the Story (5 minutes)

This week's story is quite a "come-down" from last week's. Whereas last week the Israelites were obedient to God and committed themselves to remembering that God saved them from slavery in Egypt, this week they completely turn around and reject God, creating a false god they can worship instead. Were you surprised by the Israelites sudden turn-around, or did you expect it?

This coming to God and turning away from God is a pattern the Israelites will repeat throughout the Bible, and it is a pattern that continues in our own lives today. It is important to remember that even when we're prone to wander, God's faithfulness to the promises God has made and God's love for us gives us the forgiveness and welcome home we need.

As we close our time together in prayer, remember our labyrinth activity and the ways in which we have each turned away from God. As we pray, recall your tendency to turn away from God and be reminded of God's promise to never turn away from you.

Use the following litany as a closing prayer. You may wish to print out copies, so the group can pray it out loud together.

Lord, sometimes we are more like the Israelites in the wilderness than we like to admit. We forget what you have done to deliver us. Sometimes we forget that we belong to you and just try to act like everyone else. Sometimes we place our trust in things that have no power to help us. When we do these things, remind us of who we are and whose we are. Help us to get back on the path you have for us and back to the task of blessing others. We pray these things in your holy name. Amen.

Remember to send "The Story @ Home" take home sheet with youths before dismissing them.

Turning Back to God

Use a prayer labyrinth to remember and confess times we have turned from God.



Turning Back to God

Use a prayer labyrinth to remember and confess times we have turned from God.

Prepare for the prayer journey: BREATHE

Close your eyes and take a slow, deep breath as you silently count to five. Hold the breath for three counts before slowly exhaling as you count back down to one. Repeat this three times. Open your eyes. Find the selected passage of scripture in your Bible so it is ready to go when you reach the second movement.

First movement: CONFESS

Place your finger at the opening of the prayer labyrinth. As you begin to trace the path with your finger and move toward the center of the labyrinth, think about a time (or times) when you have turned away from God. Reflect on God's constant faithfulness despite your own times of unfaithfulness. Pray a prayer of confession to God, admitting the times when you have turned away.

Is there something in your life keeping you from God? What do you need to let go of? As you move closer to the center of the labyrinth, ask God for help in letting go of the things that draw you away. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring you closer to God.

Second movement: TURNING BACK

When you reach the center of the labyrinth, read Jeremiah 29:10-11 to yourself. Think about a time when God brought you back on the right path and gave you hope. Pray a prayer of thanks to God for the promises God made to you at your baptism.

As you trace the path with your finger and return to the outside of the labyrinth, thank God for keeping God's promise to be present with you. Ask God to help you walk in God's pathways. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to what God wants you to do, and for the courage to do it!

God's Top Ten

Create a list of commandments using Hebrew numerals.

א	1
ב	2
ג	3
ד	4
ה	5
ו	6
ז	7
ח	8
ט	9
י	10

The Israelites Forget God's Promise

The Story @ Home + Youth #3-5

Exodus 32:1-14



The Point

Even when God's people rebel and turn away and worship a cow, God remembers God's promises and welcomes them back. God sticks by us no matter what. Just like the Israelites, we, too, turn from God again and again. But God sticks with us, there is nothing we can ever do to separate ourselves from God's unconditional love!

Story Connections

Last week we read about how the Israelites prepared to leave Egypt at God's command, and remembered their deliverance at the Passover celebration. This week the Israelites grow restless and create an idol to worship.

Story Summary

The Israelites Forget God's Promise

The Israelites grow impatient with Moses' leadership and with the wilderness and decide to create an idol to worship that looks a lot like the

pagan idols so commonplace at the time. The Israelites make sacrifices before their new idol, a golden calf, and bow down before it in worship, claiming that this "god" was the one to bring them out of Egypt.

Seeing this, God becomes angry, tells Moses what the people are up to, and pledges to destroy them. Moses pleads with God on behalf of the people, and God relents from the people's destruction.

Spiritual Practice: Worship

Worship reminds us of who God is and what God has done for us. When we worship, we remember God's promises to us. In turn we offer God our praise, adoration, and, really, our lives. This week take time to worship God with prayer. Around the dinner table give everyone an opportunity to thank God for one thing God has done to sustain, provide for, and protect them that day.

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, we read how God provided instructions to the Israelites about how to remember their rescue from Egypt for generations to come. This week the Israelites had already forgotten—they crafted an idol to worship and praise for their freedom instead of God. Despite this, God showed mercy on them. Next week we hear about the Israelites' arrival in the Promised Land.

Bible Nuts and Bolts: The Torah

The term "Torah" is a Hebrew term that often refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. However, it also has a wider meaning related to teaching. It can refer to the Ten Commandments given at Mount Sinai, to a single commandment, or to instruction in the law. Perhaps one of the best ways to understand the complex meaning of Torah is to read Psalm 119, which celebrates God's teaching by using a variety of words such as law, word or words, testimonies, and commandments.

The Israelites Forget God's Promise

The Story @ Home + Youth #3-5

Exodus 32:1-14

Going Deeper

As you hear and study these stories each week, consider what God has to say to you and your family. What is God's message to us? Consider the following basic pattern as a way of forming family devotions:

- ✦ Light a candle to help you focus this time as "God time." Pray a simple prayer together.
- ✦ Take a moment to check in with each other; what are each person's "highs" and "lows" today?
- ✦ Read aloud from the Daily Bible Readings from below. Discuss the questions following each.
- ✦ End with a blessing, by simply tracing a cross on each other's forehead. The Lord's Prayer is a good way to end your devotion time. If you used a candle, extinguish it as a sign of the end of the devotions.

Note: This is only a suggested pattern. It will vary with your household's context and patterns. What works best for you? First thing in the morning? Over breakfast? Bed time? Be creative and flexible with how you practice and keep your devotions!

Daily Bible Readings

Sunday - Read Exodus 32:1-14

The Israelites create a golden idol to worship.

- How do you think it felt for God to see the Israelites turn away?
- Why do you think Moses reminded God of God's promise to Abraham?

Monday - Read Exodus 32:15-20; 34:1-10

God makes a new covenant with Israel.

- Have you ever been so angry that you broke something?
- What does this passage teach us about God's faithfulness?

Tuesday - Read Deuteronomy 1:19-33

Moses reminds the Israelites of God's promises and providence.

- Think of a time when you did not trust that someone knew best for you – what happened?
- Why do you think the Israelites had so much trouble trusting God?

Wednesday - Read Deuteronomy 1:34-40; 2:1-8

God refuses to let Moses in to the Promised Land because of his distrust.

- What is a consequence you have experienced from not trusting or obeying someone in authority?
- Why do you think Joshua and the children of the Israelites were allowed into the Promised Land?

Thursday - Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9

God gives the Israelites the most important commandment.

- What do you think it means to love God with your whole mind?
- What is one thing we can do to remind ourselves daily of this command?

Friday - Read Joshua 1:1-9

God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous.

- When is a time when you needed to be brave, even though you were afraid?
- How does it feel to know that God promises to be with you wherever you go?

Saturday - Read Joshua 23:1-15

Joshua tells the Israelites to follow God's commands exactly.

- Why do you think God wanted the Israelites to live separately from the other nations?
- Do you think Joshua was confident his people would obey God? Why or why not?