

# What Do These Stones Mean?

## An Intergenerational Experience

*Joshua 3–4*

### Story Summary

The priests carried the ark of the covenant into the Jordan River. When their feet entered the water, the river stopped flowing so the Israelites could cross on dry ground. After all the Israelites crossed, someone from each tribe carried a stone from the middle of the riverbed to create a memorial. When their children asked what the stones meant, the parents could tell them about God's mighty act in drying up the river.

### Faith Link

We can remember and tell about God's faithfulness.

## Event Overview

This event guide has been designed for simplicity and ease of use. A coordinator or small group will need to organize the event and make decisions about how it is structured and which activities are offered. It is ideal to have other leaders as listed below, but the activities can be done without preassigned leaders. The "Table Talk" Guide and Explore Instructions Cards are very detailed so that anyone can run the discussion or activity with little preparation.

### Coordinator

- Assign table groups of four to eight people and find a table leader for each group. (Alternatively, people can self-select their groups and read the instructions from the "Table Talk" Guide.) Adapt group size as needed, but the goal is for groups to be intergenerational and relatively small so that everyone has an opportunity to respond to the questions and prompts.
- Set up tables for small groups. Put a "Table Talk" Guide on each table.
- Find readers for the readers theater.
- Choose Explore options, set up activity areas, and gather supplies.
- Serve as an emcee by welcoming the group, leading songs and prayers, and giving instructions for the Explore activities.
- Keep track of time and alert the groups when they need to move from activity to activity.

### Table leaders (optional)

- Facilitate a small group using the provided "Table Talk" Guide. This guide has very specific instructions about what to say and do. No advance preparation is required.
- Watch the clock so that every person has an opportunity to contribute to the conversation or answer one of the questions.

### Explore leaders (optional)

- Facilitate an Explore activity using the provided Explore Instructions Card. (The card has very specific instructions about what to do, so the activities can be done without an official leader.)
- Clean up between groups and get more supplies as needed.
- Clean up at the close of the session.

The event as outlined will take 75 minutes. It can be expanded to allow for participants to visit more than two Explore activities or incorporate more time for sharing stories.

# Event Plan

## Connect (15 minutes)

As participants arrive, have them gather at assigned or self-selected tables. Be sure there is a mix of ages at every table. Participants can do the Connect activity and discuss the questions on the “Table Talk” Guide on page 3.

When everyone has arrived, say a welcome and then sing “Come to the Table” from *Worship Songs for Children*, track 1. Invite the group to stand with their hands at shoulder height, palms facing upward and extended slightly. Explain that this posture is a version of an ancient prayer position called the *orans*. Some congregations use this posture during a prayer called “The Great Thanksgiving” that celebrates God’s faithfulness. Invite everyone to join you in the version of “The Great Thanksgiving” found on page 6. You will read the plain type; the group reads the bold type.

## Supplies

- *Everybody Sing: Worship Songs for Children* (CD or digital album)
- CD or MP3 player

## Encounter (10 minutes)

Present the Bible story using the Readers Theater on pages 9–10. Have table groups discuss one or more Encounter questions in the “Table Talk” Guide.

## Explore (35 minutes total: 5 minutes for instructions, 15 minutes per station)

Explain the Explore stations, where they are located, and how long participants will have at each station (individuals will have time to visit two stations each). Be sure the relevant Explore Instructions Card is at each station. See pages 4–5 of this guide.

Identify how the groups will be formed. Options include:

- Move as a table group from station to station
- Children self-select or are assigned a station first and then youth and adults join stations so that there is a range of ages at each one.
- Divide up by age groups.

Explore options:

- Haiku!
- Toss the Tetrahedron
- Paint with Yarn
- Build an Ark!

## SUPPLIES

- “Table Talk” Guide (p. 3)
- Readers Theater (pp. 9–10)
- Explore Instructions Cards (pp. 4–5)
- *Everybody Sing: Worship Songs for Children* (CD or digital album)
- CD or MP3 player
- Two blue blankets or towels
- Stones, one for each person
- Supplies for chosen Explore stations
- Bell for cueing group to move (optional)

## TO DO

- Print a “Table Talk” Guide (p. 3) for each table.
- Assign a leader for each table group.
- Set up a “river” and stones for use in Encounter and Bless in the middle of your meeting space. Place two blue towels or blankets on the floor with a walkway in between to simulate the river. Place a pile of stones in the middle of the walkway.
- Print the Readers Theater (pp. 9–10) and assign parts.
- Choose and set up Explore stations. Gather supplies.
- Print the related Explore Instructions Cards (pp. 4–5) and place them at each station.

## Share (10 minutes)

Have participants return to their original table groups. Table leaders can use the Share section of the “Table Talk” Guide to facilitate conversation.

## Bless (5 minutes)

Gather around the “river” you used in Encounter. Invite the group to line up and pass slowly through the river, one at a time, as you listen to “Spirit of God” from *Worship Songs for Children*, track 14 (repeat as necessary). On reaching the middle, each person will pick up a stone.

After everyone has returned to the circle, send the group with these words adapted from Psalm 57:9–10.

**We will praise you, O God, to all who will hear.**

**We will tell and sing of your mercy to our children.**

**Your steadfast love is as high as the heavens,  
and your faithfulness extends to the clouds.**

**Thanks be to God!**

## "TABLE TALK" GUIDE

Use this guide to facilitate group activities and discussions.

### Connect

Invite participants to share "I remember when" stories that are often told around the dinner table or when their extended family gets together. It might be a funny tale about when a parent was a child, something that happened before they were born, or an important day in the family's history. How did they come to know these stories? Ask why it's important to keep telling stories of things that happened long ago. In today's story, the Israelites plan to share an important story from their history.

### Encounter

*The questions about the Bible story move from simple and general to more complex. Choose one or more questions appropriate for the ages and developmental levels of the people in the group. Everyone could answer the same question, or you could pose different questions to different people.*

- Imagine sitting on the banks of the Jordan River the night before crossing into the Promised Land. What hopes might you have? What fears?
- Joshua said that God would do a wonderful thing for the people the next day. I wonder what they thought might happen.
- Joshua set up a stone memorial in the middle of the Jordan, where no one would ever see it. Why do you think he did that?
- The Israelites did set up stones where people could see them as well. Why might it be important for children to ask what the stones mean?
- Imagine your church were to set up a memorial for the coronavirus pandemic. What might it look like? What questions do you think future generations will ask about this time? What might you want them to ask?

### Share

Give everyone an opportunity to share their stories using one of the activities from an Explore station they visited.

#### **Haiku!**

- Share your pandemic lament and "silver lining" poems with the group.

#### **Toss the Tetrahedron**

- Toss your tetrahedron and share your story from the side where it lands (bottom).

#### **Paint with Yarn**

- Share the yarn painting you created and the story behind it.

#### **Build an Ark!**

- Share about creating the church's story ark, items you added, and what they help you recall about your church's experience of the pandemic.

After everyone has shared, pose some of these questions.

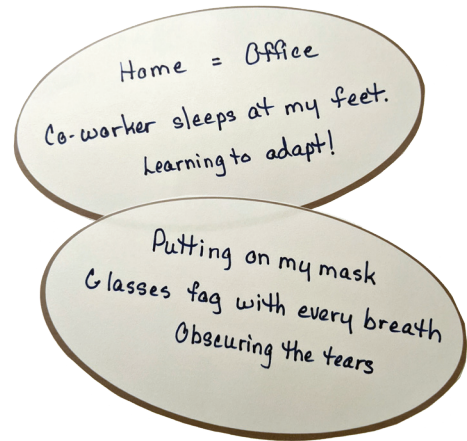
- When or where have you seen God at work during the pandemic?
- What have you learned during this time? About yourself? About God? About your church?
- As time passes, will future generations be interested in hearing our stories from the coronavirus pandemic? Why or why not?
- What would you want to tell your children or grandchildren about this time?

## Haiku!

Describe your pandemic highs and lows through poetry. A haiku poem is a short three-line poem structured with five syllables in the first line, seven syllables in the second, and five in the third. Use stones cut out from the Stones Template on page 7 to create two haiku poems: one that describes a lament or something you found difficult about the pandemic, and a second poem that describes a “silver lining” or a learning that you’ve experienced from the pandemic. Write the lament haiku on one stone and the “silver lining” on the other.

### Supplies

- Stones Template (p. 7)
- Pens or markers of different colors

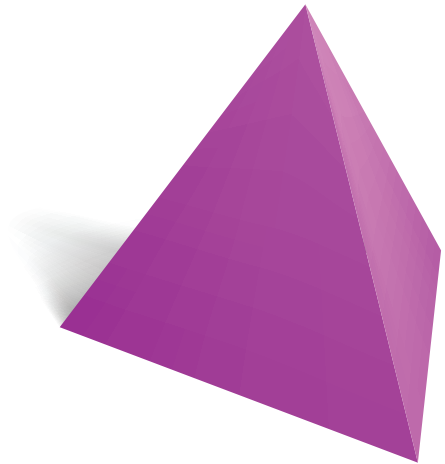


## Toss the Tetrahedron

Create a storytelling tetrahedron to help you share your experiences of the past 18–20 months using the template provided. On two sides, write words or draw a picture that helps you describe the difficulties you’ve faced during the pandemic. On the remaining two sides, write words or draw a picture that helps you describe a good experience or a learning from the pandemic. Cut out the tetrahedron, fold, and assemble using tape.

### Supplies

- Tetrahedron Template (p. 8)
- Pencils, pens, or markers
- Scissors
- Tape



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## Paint with Yarn

Yarn painting is an ancient art form from the Huichol (WEE-chol) people of western Mexico. The Huichol live in small communities in the Sierra Madre mountain range. They “paint” with yarn to record and remember their ancient stories and symbolize important events. To do this, they press cords of colored yarn into beeswax spread across a board. Individuals can create their own yarn art to remember their experiences of the pandemic. Instructions are on page 6.

### Supplies

- Paint with Yarn Instructions (p. 6)
- Small pieces of cardboard—3-in / 8-cm squares
- Pencils
- Glue
- Scissors
- Short pieces of yarn of various colors



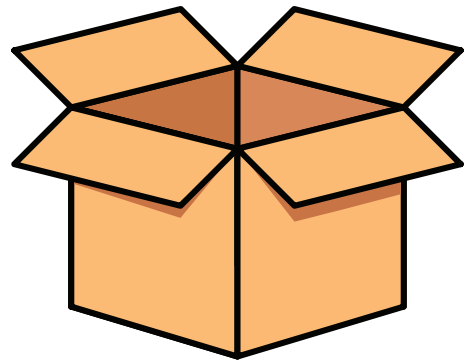
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## Build an Ark!

When people hear the word *ark* in the Bible, they usually think of the story of Noah. The ark of the covenant is not as familiar but is just as important. The ark of the covenant in Joshua was a chest that carried some of the most precious things that Israel brought with them out of their wilderness journey from Egypt to the Promised Land—stone tablets, a jar of manna, and Aaron’s staff. Work together to create your church’s own story ark. Cover a large box with pictures, words, Bible verses, and other things that remind you of how things changed for your church during the pandemic and how you remained connected to each other. You may want to put objects into the box. Ideas include a mask, hand sanitizer, a hymnal with songs marked, items or symbols shaped from clay, drawings, clippings from your church newsletter or a community newspaper, or other meaningful items.

### Supplies

- Bibles
- Pencils or markers
- A large box
- Art supplies: paper, glue, markers, modeling clay
- Church newsletters, newspapers
- Glue or tape



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# The Great Thanksgiving

Print and copy for use in Connect.

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give God thanks and praise.**

When we cried out to you, you heard us and set us free.

You divided the sea and let us pass through.

You led us with a cloud and a fiery light.

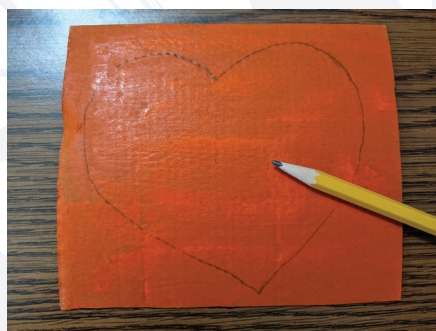
You made streams come out of a rock and caused waters to flow.

We praise you, saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory. Amen.**

## Paint with Yarn Instructions

Print for use in Explore.



### Step 1:

On a small piece of cardboard, draw a symbol or design that expresses your experience of the pandemic. Keep it simple.



### Step 2:

Squeeze a line of glue where you want to place your first piece of yarn.



### Step 3:

Press the yarn into the glue. Cut off any extra yarn or frayed ends.



### Step 4:

Continue adding pieces of yarn to your design, winding them around and pushing them close together.



### Step 5:

Continue gluing and winding yarn of various colors until your design is complete.

## STONES TEMPLATE

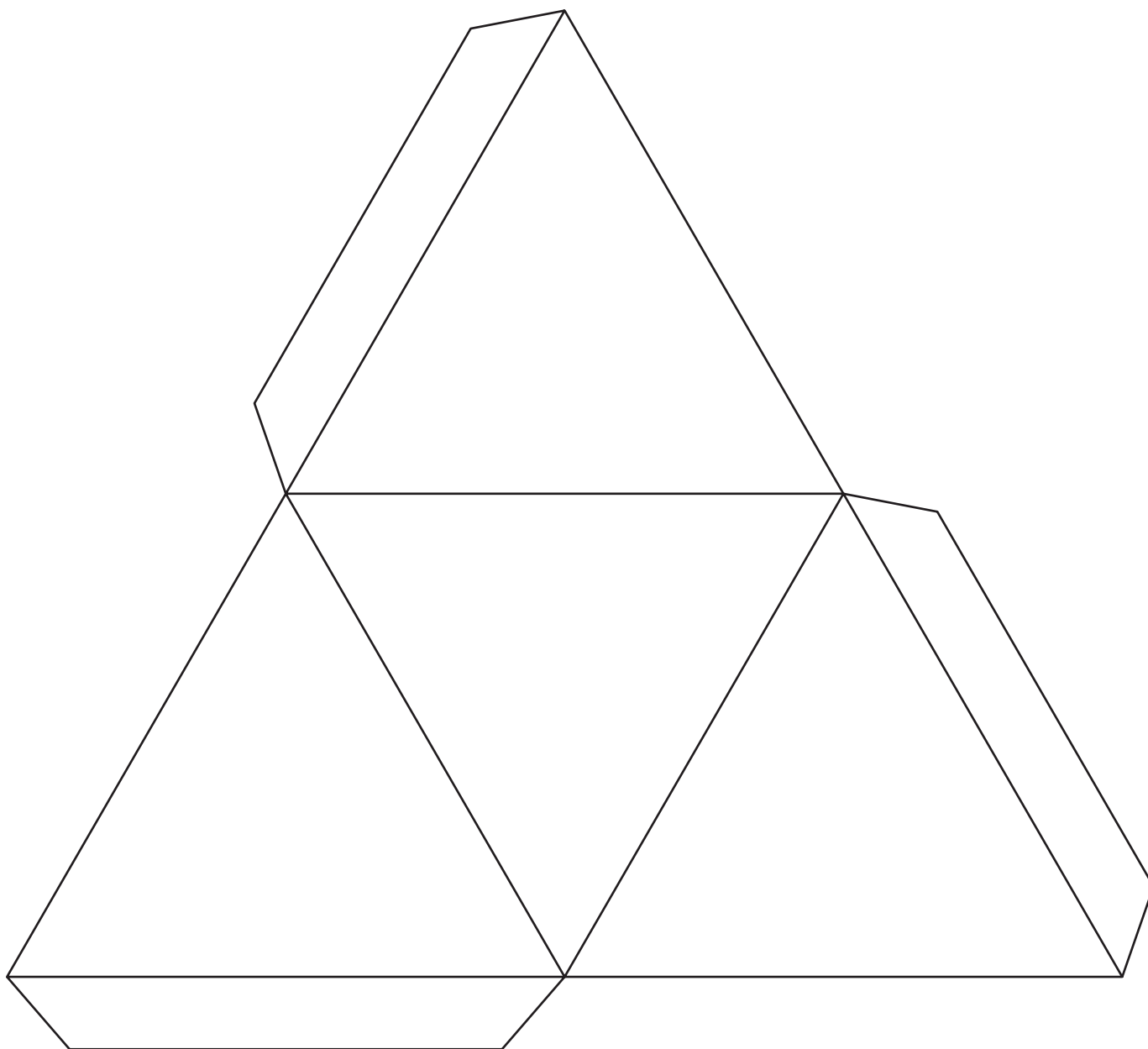
Print, copy, and cut out two stones per person for use in Explore.



ogjeurvil / iStock / Getty Images Plus

## TETRAHEDRON TEMPLATE

Print and copy (one per person) for use in Explore.





# Crossing the Jordan

An eyewitness account from Joshua 3–4

Cast: Reporter, Israelite, Joshua, God, Priest, Child, Israelite Parent

**Reporter:** This morning a group calling themselves the Israelites crossed the Jordan River on dry ground. The waters are still parted, and a group is standing in the middle holding a large box they call an ark. Who are these people, and what are they doing here? That's what we're here to find out. (*Approaches an Israelite*) Excuse me, but can you tell me what happened this morning?

**Israelite:** Well, after 40 years wandering through the desert, our group finally arrived at the banks of the Jordan and set up camp. Three days passed, then officers went through our camp and said, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God being carried by the priests, follow it, so that you may know the way you should go, for you have not passed this way before. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, a distance of about 2,000 cubits; do not come any nearer to it." Joshua told us to get ready because tomorrow God is going to do wonders among us.

**Reporter:** Here is Joshua, the leader of these Israelites. Joshua, what led you to say that God will do wonders?

**Joshua:** God spoke to me. So I called the Israelites together and told them what God had said. (*Pauses as though remembering.*)

**God:** (*offstage*) All Israel will know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant, "When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan."

**Joshua:** Yes, I told the people, "By this you shall know that among you is the living God: the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord touch the waters of the Jordan, the waters will stand still."

**Reporter:** Let's talk to one of the priests carrying the ark, the sign of God's presence. Sir, what did you do when you heard Joshua say these things?

**Priest:** Well, the Jordan normally overflows all its banks this time of year. But we priests did as Joshua commanded anyway, and when our feet touched the edge of the river, the waters stood still, leaving us on dry ground. We stood in the middle of the river until all the people crossed to the other side.

**Reporter:** What a remarkable story. But, wait—something seems to be happening among the people now. Let's listen in and see what's happening:

**Joshua:** (*loudly*) Listen! God has said, "Select 12 men, one from each tribe, and command them to take 12 stones out of the middle of the Jordan. Carry these stones with you and lay them down in the place where you camp tonight." Each of you 12 who have been chosen must pass before the ark of the Lord and take up a stone on your shoulder, one for each of the tribes of Israel. Build a memorial with these stones to help you remember what happened today.

**Reporter:** The 12 men are now gathering the stones. Meanwhile, Joshua is setting up 12 stones in the river in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood. Those rocks will probably stay in the riverbed forever.

(*Pause.*)

Now the priests are moving out of the middle of the Jordan and crossing in front of the people, to once again lead the way. There must be 40,000 people moving toward Jericho. The waters of the Jordan are returning, and the Israelites plan to set up camp east of Jericho at Gilgal.

**Child:** (*pointing to the pile of rocks in the middle of the river*) What does that pile of stones mean?

**Israelite Parent:** This is where Israel crossed over the Jordan River on dry ground. God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you, as God did for our ancestors at the Red Sea long ago. Now everyone will know the wonderful things God has done for us. Every time you pass by these stones, remember and tell the story.