

GOD'S JUST SERVANT

MAIN IDEA

Jesus upholds God's justice in the Temple (Matt. 21), fulfilling Isaiah 42's vision of the Messiah.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 42

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. (Isa. 42:1)

PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself as leader. Also read and reflect on lesson 6, "God's Just Servant" (Participant's Book, p. 31).
- Familiarize yourself with the context of this lesson: Jesus' cleansing of the Temple in Matthew is an example of Isaiah 42's vision of the Messiah.
- Obtain Worship Leaflets for lesson 5. Also set up the six Lenten candles.
- Step 6 in each lesson offers options for activities from which to choose. Consider which will best serve the focus of the lesson.
- If you plan to sing the hymn suggested in the Worship Leaflet, arrange for an accompanist or a choir member to lead the singing.

LEADING THE LESSON

Opening Worship

1. Gathering

- Welcome participants as they arrive, greeting them by name.
- Distribute Bibles and Participant’s Books to those who did not bring them, and Worship Leaflets for lesson 6 to everyone. Encourage participants to bring their Participant’s Books and Bibles each week.
- Review the simple ground rules for conversation the group previously adopted.

2. Morning Prayer

Worship Leaflet, lesson 6

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet. Enlist volunteers to read portions of morning prayer. Light one Lenten candles, leaving five unlit.
- Encourage the group to settle into silence, seeking a sense of the presence of God in their midst.
- Begin with the Opening Sentences, and end after the Morning Hymn.
- End with a few moments of silence.

Teaching Tip
<p>Some participants may come to class this morning expecting the Palm Sunday narrative to be the focus of the lesson. As the Participant’s Book reminds us, it is tempting to go straight from the “Hosanna” of Palm Sunday to the joyous “Alleluia” of Easter without traveling the difficult road that lies between the two. The somber events of Holy Week bring our attention to how Jesus responded to the injustices of his time in the religious establishment and the structures of the occupying government of Rome.</p>

SCRIPTURE

Isa. 42:1–9

42:1 Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;

he will bring forth justice to the nations.

²He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;

^{3a}a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.

⁴He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

⁵Thus says God, the LORD,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:

⁶I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;

I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,

⁷to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

⁸I am the LORD, that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.

⁹See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;

before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

1. Jesus' cleansing of the Temple in Matthew 21 is an example of Isaiah 42's vision of the Messiah.
2. Isaiah 42:1–4 constitutes the first of several Servant Songs in Isaiah (see Isa. 49:1–6; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12). There are differing views of the identity of the Servant in the passages. In some cases the Servant is seen as the nation of Israel; in others the Servant signifies a special person; and in still others both are signified.
3. Matthew 12:15–21 quotes this Scripture and identifies Jesus as the Servant.

Bible Study

3. Scripture Reading

Participant's Book, p. 32

- Invite the group to read Isaiah 42:1–9. Form two groups, and read the passage responsively, with each group reading every other verse.
- Option: Form two groups. Group 1 will read aloud verses 1–4, which are a description of the One who is to come. Group 2 will continue by reading aloud verses 5–9, where the Lord speaks, announcing the purpose of this One who is to come.

4. The Servant of the Lord

Participant's Book, p. 32

- Invite participants to describe the context of the prophet we call Deutero-Isaiah or Second Isaiah. Or, if you prefer, give a minilecture describing his context and making the following key points:
 1. Isaiah was a prophet of the southern kingdom of Judah in the eighth century BCE.
 2. After chapter 40, the book is set centuries later, after Jerusalem has already been destroyed and the people of Judah are in exile in Babylon.
 3. The name of Isaiah is not mentioned again after chapter 39, so it is clear that this portion of Isaiah was not written by the historical Isaiah but by an anonymous prophet living in Babylon in the sixth century BCE. We usually call this prophet Deutero-Isaiah or Second Isaiah.
- Ask the group to report what they gleaned from their reading about the Servant of Yahweh and what his special calling was. Also share these key points:
 1. Isaiah 42:1–4 is the first of several Servant Songs in Isaiah (see Isa. 49:1–6; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12).
 2. There are differing views of the identity of the Servant in the passages. In some cases the Servant is seen as the nation of Israel; in others the Servant signifies a special person; and in still others both are signified.
- Discuss:
 1. Through what means does the spirit of God come to rest upon us today?
 2. For what task(s) has God set us apart as individual believers and as a church?

5. The Messiah

Participant's Book, p. 34

- Ask: How are the titles “Jesus,” “Christ,” and “Messiah” related?
- On newsprint or a board, print *Suffering Servant* over one column and *Messiah* over the other. Invite participants to name characteristics of each title.
- Discuss:
 1. What are the differences between how Judaism and Christianity view these two titles?
 2. Why do you think it was difficult for the people of Jesus' day—including his own disciples—to consider that the kingly Messiah and the Suffering Servant could be one and the same?

6. Stepping into the World

Participant's Book, p. 35

- Ask participants to reflect in silence on what Jesus means for them personally. Then ask one or two volunteers to comment.
- Jesus, the Servant of the Lord, came not just to redeem individuals; he came to redeem the world as a whole, including bringing justice to the oppressed. Ask:
 1. In what ways do you affirm that statement?
 2. Where are you challenged by this idea?
 3. Are there individuals or groups you find it problematic to include? Why? How do you define an inclusive church?
 4. What steps do you think we should take to make our church and community places of inclusion? How can we work intentionally to ensure just communities for all?
- Choose from the following optional ideas to explore the Scripture:
 1. List ways inequity is practiced in church and society, and discuss how these may be overcome and avoided.
 2. Have participants examine their lives to determine how they may be practicing injustices and how they may correct these practices. Invite them to settle into silence, focusing on a sense of God's presence. Ask them to consider injustices in their family, church, community, nation, or world. Encourage them to jot one or more down on paper, and then bring them before God in prayer. Ask them to consider the following: How might I be participating in perpetuating this wrong? What steps might I take to begin addressing it?
 3. Discuss: How does Jesus as Messiah and Servant show us how to live just lives?

Closing Worship

7. Morning Prayer 2

Worship Leaflet, lesson 6

- Enlist volunteers to lead remaining portions of morning prayer.
- Begin with Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession, say the Lord's Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.
- Extinguish the candle.
- Send participants forth by saying individually to each person, "Go in peace to love and serve the Suffering Servant, Jesus Christ."

A LOOK AHEAD

DAILY BIBLE READINGS			
M	Apr. 6	Women Find Jesus' Tomb Empty	Mark 16:1–8
T	Apr. 7	Saul Meets Jesus on Damascus Road	Acts 9:1–9
W	Apr. 8	Free Gift of Grace and Hope	Rom. 5:12–17
T	Apr. 9	The Dead in Christ Will Rise	1 Thess. 4:13–18
F	Apr. 10	All Things under God's Control	1 Cor. 15:24–28
S	Apr. 11	Victory through Our Lord Jesus Christ	1 Cor. 15:50–58

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Encouraging participants, as they attend Holy Week services, to reflect on how Jesus exemplified the qualities of the Suffering Servant as he experienced the injustice of being arrested, beaten, tried, and finally executed by the powers of injustice.

RESURRECTION HOPE



MAIN IDEA

In 1 Corinthians and Mark, only life through the resurrection of Christ engenders hope for authentic justice.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Mark 16; 1 Corinthians 15

VERSES TO REMEMBER

If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. (1 Cor. 15:19–20)

PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself as leader. Also read and reflect on lesson 7, “Resurrection Hope” (Participant’s Book, p. 37).
- Since today is Easter, read Mark 16 silently, and reflect on what the resurrection means to you.
- Familiarize yourself with the context of this lesson: Leaders like Paul in the early church faced the challenge of explaining the nature of the resurrection amid conflicting views among the Greeks, who readily embraced the immortality of the soul but had trouble with the notion of the body being raised.
- Obtain Worship Leaflets for lesson 7. Also set up the six Lenten candles and an additional white pillar candle, the Christ candle.
- Step 6 in each lesson offers options for activities from which to choose. Consider which will best serve the focus of the lesson.

LEADING THE LESSON

Opening Worship

1. Gathering

- Welcome participants with the traditional greeting “Christ is risen!” Encourage them to respond, “Christ is risen indeed!”
- Distribute Bibles and Participant’s Books to those who need them, and Worship Leaflets for lesson 7 to everyone.
- If you plan to use the optional method of Scripture reading, recruit someone to take the part of a leader in the Corinthian church.
- Review the simple ground rules for conversation the group previously adopted.

2. Morning Prayer 1

Worship Leaflet, lesson 7

- Invite participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet. Enlist volunteers to read portions of morning prayer.
- Call attention to the six unlit Lenten candles, a symbol of moving from light to darkness.
- Pause for a few moments of silence, then light the Christ candle
- Begin with the Opening Sentences, and end after the Morning Hymn.
- Conclude with a few moments of silence.

Teaching Tip

Although the resurrection is central to our belief as Christians, participants may have a range of understandings of that event. Some persons may hold beliefs close to those of the Greeks whom Paul addressed, perhaps having an understanding of the resurrection of the soul but not the body. Others may adhere to a belief in Jesus’ resurrection without having examined that belief too closely. All Christians can attest to the meaning of the resurrection while still affirming its mystery and power.

SCRIPTURE

1 Cor. 15:1–8, 12–14, 20–23, 42–45

15:1 Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ²through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

³For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. . . .

¹²Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; ¹⁴and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. . . .

²⁰But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. ²¹For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; ²²for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. . . .

⁴²So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. ⁴⁴It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

1. In explaining the nature of the resurrection, Paul faced the conflicting views among the Greeks, who readily embraced the immortality of the soul but had trouble with the notion of the body being raised (Acts 17:32).
2. In 15:35–44, Paul makes the point that there are many kinds of “bodies,” in which case the resurrection body is a new nonperishable body specially gifted from God (vv. 45–48).
3. In 1 Corinthians and Mark, only life through the resurrection of Christ engenders hope for authentic justice.

Bible Study

3. Scripture Reading

Participant's Book, p. 38

- Invite the group to read 1 Corinthians 15:1–8, 12–14, 20–23, 42–45 in round-robin fashion, with each participant reading one verse in turn.
- Option: To set the stage, tell participants that in the early church after Paul had visited a community of believers, he would often address a letter to those Christians. It was the custom for that letter sent by Paul to be read aloud to the assembled believers. Remind the group that as Greek Christians, the Corinthians readily embraced the immortality of the soul but had trouble with the notion of the body being raised. With this background, ask participants to imagine themselves to be members of the house church as Corinth worshiping together. Then have the reader you recruited to read the Scripture.

4. The Resurrection

Participant's Book, p. 39

- Invite participants to refer to “The Resurrection” to name relevant facts about the meaning of the word *resurrection*.
- Point out that although today celebrates the Resurrection, we usually refer to it by other names. As participants name each one, list them on a board or a sheet of newsprint. Also ask volunteers to read aloud the relevant Scriptures cited in the participant handout for each name (Matt. 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7; John 18:39; 1 Cor. 5:7; John 20:1).
- Discuss:
 1. How do the different names for Easter highlight different aspects of this day?
 2. If you had to choose one name for this event, which one would it be? Which name do you think is the most fitting? Why?
 3. Sometimes Christians refer to themselves as Easter people. How do you respond? Do you consider this designation to be a good way to describe yourself?

5. A Celebration of Hope

Participant's Book, p. 40

- Ask someone to read aloud Leviticus 23:10–14. Invite volunteers to explain the expression “first fruits.” Ask: How does Paul apply this understanding to the resurrection?
- What evidence does Paul cite to provide proof of the Lord's resurrection?
- Although in a Christian funeral we mourn the loss and celebrate the life of a loved one, the funeral is primarily about the resurrection of Jesus and our resurrection. How do you respond? Has this been your experience in attending a funeral?

- In what ways does your own understanding of resurrection impact how you feel when someone dies?

6. Stepping into the World

Participant's Book, p. 41

- Invite participants to name ways we celebrate Christmas and Easter, including how we decorate.
- Discuss:
 1. The observation is made that we are unlikely to see any “empty tomb” decorations on people’s lawns at Easter. Why?
 2. How do you respond to the idea that Easter is far more confrontational than Christmas? Would you agree? Why or why not?
 3. We read that it is possible to celebrate the birth of Jesus without committing ourselves to any particular understanding of who Jesus is or was. What makes Easter different?
 4. Easter is not simply about our personal redemption but about the redemption of the world. How do you respond?
 5. What is the connection between the character of the Messiah and an understanding of justice for the whole of creation?
- Choose from the following optional ideas to explore the Scripture:
 1. Invite participants to list ways the resurrection motivates us to work for justice with hope.
 2. Many Christians say they are willing to bear sorrow and suffering in this life, looking forward to hope of the life to come. Do you think Christians have sometimes used this understanding as a justification for not addressing issues of injustice that affect others? Why or why not?
 3. Ask participants to read Mark 16:1–8 silently. Invite them to role-play the scene. Discuss how the story of the resurrection relates to Paul’s teaching about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15.

Closing Worship

7. Morning Prayer 2

Worship Leaflet, lesson 7

- Enlist volunteers to lead remaining portions of morning prayer.
- Begin with Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession, say the Lord’s Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.
- Extinguish the Christ candle.
- Send participants forth by saying individually to each person, “Go forth in hope, knowing you are part of a joyous Easter people.”

A LOOK AHEAD

DAILY BIBLE READINGS			
M	Apr. 13	Mordecai Refuses to Bow to Haman	Esth. 3:1–6
T	Apr. 14	Haman Sets Decree to Destroy the Jews	Esth. 3:7–11
W	Apr. 15	Haman Builds Gallows to Hang Mordecai	Esth. 5:9–14
T	Apr. 16	Decree against Jews Struck Down	Esth. 8:3–8, 16–17
F	Apr. 17	Festival of Purim Established	Esth. 9:18–23, 29–32
S	Apr. 18	Mordecai Advances Welfare of the Jews	Esth. 10:1–3

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Suggesting that participants listen to a recording of part 2 of *The Messiah* that includes portions of Isaiah 53:4–12.
2. Pointing out that the weekly readings will give them the background and context for next week’s lesson, “Injustice Will Be Punished” (Esth. 7:1–10).

INJUSTICE WILL BE PUNISHED

MAIN IDEA

The story of Esther's triumph over Haman provides assurance that evil does not prevail.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Esther 3; 5; 7

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. (Esth. 7:10)

PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself as leader. Also read and reflect on lesson 8, "Injustice Will Be Punished" (Participant's Book, p. 43).
- Familiarize yourself with the context of Esther: King Ahasuerus (v. 5) was the Persian king Xerxes I (486–464 BCE.). The book provides support for the importance of the Jewish Feast of Purim.
- Obtain Worship Leaflets for lesson 8.
- On newsprint or a board, post the first three of the previous week's daily Bible readings:
 1. Esther 3:1–6 Mordecai Refuses to Bow to Haman
 2. Esther 3:7–11 Haman Sets Decree to Destroy the Jews
 3. Esther 5:9–14 Haman Builds Gallows to Hang Mordecai
- Also review the story leading up to today's Scripture so you can tell it yourself.
- In lesson 2, the Participant's Book examined Habakkuk's prayer. Review that portion of the lesson as you consider what lesson 8 has to say about prayer.
- The website Judaism 101 (<http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday9.htm>) provides more about the Feast of Purim. If you like, download and make copies of relevant information.
- Set up the white Christ candle for lighting.

LEADING THE LESSON

Opening Worship

1. Gathering

- Welcome class members and guests by name.
- Distribute Bibles and Participant's Books to those who did not bring theirs and Worship Leaflets for lesson 8 to everyone. Encourage participants to bring their Participant's Books and Bibles each week.
- Review simple ground rules and organization (such as time to begin and end, welcoming of all points of view, confidentiality, and so on).

2. Morning Prayer 1

Worship Leaflet, lesson 8

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet.
- Light the Christ candle.
- Enlist volunteers to read portions of morning prayer.
- Encourage the group to settle into silence, seeking a sense of the presence of God in their midst.
- Begin with the Opening Sentences, and end after the Morning Hymn.
- End with a few moments of silence.

Teaching Tip

This lesson's Scripture is the only narrative account in the study. Read over the story leading up to today's passage several times so that you can tell it with fluency. Consider what props might help prompt you in the telling. Try to give enough detail that the group can imagine the scene—what they might smell, hear, or feel, not just what they might see. Encourage them to enter fully into the story.

SCRIPTURE

Esth. 7:1–10

7:1 So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. ²On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, “What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” ³Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request. ⁴For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king.” ⁵Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?” ⁶Esther said, “A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. ⁷The king rose from the feast in wrath and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that the king had determined to destroy him. ⁸When the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman had thrown himself on the couch where Esther was reclining; and the king said, “Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?” As the words left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman’s face. ⁹Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, “Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high.” And the king said, “Hang him on that.” ¹⁰So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

1. The book of Esther is noteworthy for its lack of mentioning God and not including Jewish religious practice such as law, covenant, and dietary regulations. Even though the name of God is not mentioned, God’s divine presence and providence are evident. The religious practice of fast is used, and the practice of prayer is presumed from this, among other things. The role of God is spelled out more specifically in deuterocanonical literature written later.
2. King Ahasuerus (v. 5) was the Persian king Xerxes I (486–464 BCE).
3. Harbona (v. 9) is one of the seven eunuchs sent by the king to summon Queen Vashti to his banquet (1:10).

Bible Study

3. Scripture Reading

Participant's Book, p. 44

- Call the group's attention to the topics and Scripture passages from the previous week's Daily Bible Readings. Ask volunteers to read the topics aloud as a way of putting today's Scripture reading in context. Invite the group to read Esther 7:1–10 aloud in unison.
- Option: Tell the group that it is customary during the Jewish holiday of Purim for worshipers to read the entire book of Esther aloud. Quickly tell the story of Esther leading up to this passage. Suggest that they read this portion of the book as a reader's theater. Ask participants to take the parts of Esther, King Ahasuerus, Haman, and Harbona. The rest of the group will act as narrator.
- Take a few moments for participants to read over the passage silently, and then read it aloud.

4. Prayer

Participant's Book, p. 44

- Ask participants to tell what they know about the context of the book of Esther. If the following points do not emerge in the discussion, bring them out now:
 1. Unlike most of the Scripture from the Prophets that the group has encountered previously in the study, this book is a narrative.
 2. It is set in the exile after the Babylonian Empire had been conquered by the Persians.
 3. The book is unique in that that it is the only biblical book where there is no mention of God, nor do any of the characters pray or worship.
- Remind the group that in lesson 2, they discussed Habakkuk's heartfelt prayer to God. Despite the fact that prayer is not mentioned in Esther, we can gain insight into prayer from the book.
- Discuss:
 1. Where does the language we use for prayer come from, and what reason is given for adopting this language?
 2. How does Esther's entreaty to the king provide a model for prayer?
 3. What is your response to this question: "If God already knows everything, why pray?"

5. Considering Irony

Participant's Book, p. 45

- Have someone define *irony*. Ask volunteers to explain the examples of comic irony and tragic irony in the portion of Esther's story in today's Scripture.
- Discuss:
 1. Name other stories, in the Bible or in other literature, that use irony to drive home their point. Which ones use comic irony? Which use tragic irony?
 2. The point is made here that justice will eventually prevail—a point made in previous lessons in this study. How do you respond? What events or situations can you name where we await God's justice in God's time?

6. Stepping into the World

Participant's Book, p. 47

- Invite a volunteer to read aloud Esther 9:24–32, the account of the establishment of the Feast of Purim. Form seven pairs or small groups, and assign one of the features of Purim to each (in a very small class, assign the features to individual participants). Participants with smartphones may want to get additional information at the website of Judaism 101, or you can hand out copies of information you downloaded and copied.
- After a few minutes, ask each individual, pair, or small group to report on their assigned feature. Discuss:
 1. If you have ever attended a Purim carnival or participated in some other way in celebrating Purim, describe your experience.
 2. How are our Easter traditions similar to Purim traditions? How do they differ?
- Choose from the following optional ideas to explore the Scripture:
 1. In this account, religious values such as kindness, mercy, and forgiveness are lacking. Instead, the story evidences a vengeful, bloodthirsty, and chauvinistic spirit. Ask: How, if at all, are you able to reconcile these values with the idea that God is at work through them?
 2. Discuss how well the story satisfies one's sense of justice. Say that wicked people often seem to attain great power and wealth. Ask: What evidence is there that people will receive the recompense their evil deeds deserve?
 3. Encourage participants to write a prayer expressing the hope of the triumph of justice over evil. Ask one or two volunteers to read their prayers.

Closing Worship

7. Morning Prayer 2

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet.
- Enlist volunteers to lead remaining portions of morning prayer.
- Begin with Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession, say the Lord's Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.
- Extinguish the Christ candle.
- Bless each person as he or she leaves with these words: “(Name), may you be blessed as you seek to do God’s will for such a time as this.”

A LOOK AHEAD

DAILY BIBLE READINGS			
M	Apr. 20	Solomon Makes a Just Decision	1 Kgs. 3:16–28
T	Apr. 21	Jesus Issues His Platform for Justice	Luke 4:14–21
W	Apr. 22	The Year of Jubilee Established	Lev. 25:8–17
T	Apr. 23	A Light to the Nations	Isa. 49:1–7
F	Apr. 24	A New Vision for the People	Isa. 61:1–7
S	Apr. 25	Zion Welcomes the Redeemed Home	Isa. 62:5–12

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Suggesting they reflect on what was at stake for Esther in pursuing justice. What did she risk losing? What are you willing to risk in order to stand up for justice?
2. In preparation for lesson 9, encouraging participants to reflect on solemn promises they have made: marriage vows, perhaps, or responses at a baptism or when being ordained to a church office.

THE LORD LOVES JUSTICE

MAIN IDEA

Isaiah affirms that the righteous will be vindicated.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 61:8–62:12

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. (Isa. 61:8)

PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself as leader. Also read and reflect on lesson 9, “The Lord Loves Justice” (Participant’s Book, p. 49).
- Familiarize yourself with the context of this lesson, in which the people who had returned from the Babylonian exile had been in Jerusalem for eighteen years. Instead of the prosperity they had hoped for, the returning exiles were enduring poverty and hunger.
- Obtain Worship Leaflets for lesson 8.
- Continue to have the Christ candle available.
- Step 6 in each lesson offers options for activities from which to choose. Consider which will best serve the focus of the lesson.
- If you plan to sing the hymn suggested in the Worship Leaflet, arrange to have an accompanist or choir member lead the singing.

LEADING THE LESSON

Opening Worship

1. Gathering

- Welcome class members and guests by name.
- Distribute Bibles and Participant's Books to those who did not bring theirs and Worship Leaflets for lesson 9 to everyone. Encourage participants to bring their Participant's Books and Bibles each week.
- Review simple ground rules and organization (such as time to begin and end, welcoming of all points of view, confidentiality, and so on).

2. Morning Prayer 1

Worship Leaflet, lesson 9

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet.
- Light the Christ candle.
- Enlist volunteers to read portions of morning prayer.
- Encourage the group to settle into silence, seeking a sense of the presence of God in their midst.
- Begin with the Opening Sentences, and end after the Morning Hymn.
- End with a few moments of silence.

Teaching Tip

The imagery of the wedding with its bridegroom and bride may carry negative freight for some. Those who long to be married and have not had that opportunity or those who have been widowed or divorced may find this image less than hopeful. Others who have never desired to be married may not relate to marriage as an image of a hopeful future. Be aware of the variety of life experiences represented in your group.

SCRIPTURE

Isa. 61:8–11; 62:2–4a

61:8 For I the LORD love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
⁹Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.
¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
¹¹For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

.....
62:2 The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will give.
³You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
⁴You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

1. New Testament uses of the bridegroom/bride imagery for the relationship between God (or Christ) and the Church include Ephesians 5:25–27 and Revelation 21:2, 9.
2. The “sentinels” of verse 62:6 were some sort of prophetic guardians who interceded for Zion while on the lookout for the fulfillment of God’s promises. These have been interpreted to be either priests, prophets, or some kind of angelic beings.
3. Verses 62:10–12 once again emphasize Israel’s role as a light to the nations and God’s invitation to all nations to become part of God’s people.

Bible Study

3. Scripture Reading

Participant's Book, p. 50

- Form two groups. Have one group read aloud Isaiah 61:8–11, and the other, 62:2–4a.
- Option: Invite the group to read silently the introduction to lesson 9, in which we read that our most solemn ceremonies are based on future-oriented promises. Then ask them to silently read the Scripture passage, underlining the words and phrases that express that sense of the future (“will make”; “shall be known”; “will see”; and so forth). Ask the group to read the passage aloud, emphasizing these words and phrases by reading them more slowly and with a louder volume.

4. God's Steadfast Love

Participant's Book, p. 50

- Call the group's attention to the heading of this portion of the Participant's Book. Remind the group that they have considered the meaning of *hesed*, steadfast love, in a previous lesson. Invite volunteers to describe the qualities that characterize *hesed*.
- We read that the people were discouraged because God's promises were not being fulfilled. Discuss the following:
 1. What did the prophet Haggai propose was the answer? In contrast, what did the prophet Isaiah suggest?
 2. What was the solution sought by Ezra and Nehemiah? What was Isaiah's vision?
- The answer to God's promised restoration is to be found in God's character and a renewed covenant. Discuss:
 1. Which vision—the homogeneous society of Ezra and Nehemiah or Isaiah's radically inclusive society— do you think best exemplifies a society where righteousness and justice flourish? Why?
 2. Where in our context do you see parallels to the situation facing the people in this Scripture passage? What is the current mood of our society, and in what ways are people responding out of their discouragement? What initiatives and policies are some espousing to ensure a homogeneous society? What policies are tending toward a more radical inclusivity?

5. A Great Reversal

Participant's Book, p. 52

- Invite participants to name biblical persons whose name changes signified changes in their lives. Ask them to tell of other instances where a change of name communicated something important.
- Discuss:
 1. What was the original meaning of Jerusalem's name?
 2. What had it come to be called, and what did that signify?
 3. If you had a childhood nickname, what did it mean, and how did it describe you? Did you put it aside at maturity? If so, why?
 4. Have you ever been led to make a radical change? How did that change affect you?

6. Stepping into the World

Participant's Book, p. 53

- It is hard to view our country's landscape and not see the ruins of the past, wishing for their restoration. With the caveat that we should agree not to descend into purely partisan arguments, ask the group to respond, popcorn style, to the following:
- In our country today, I feel very discouraged by. . . .
- Discuss:
 1. Do you agree that God seems silent in the midst of the situation in which we are living? Why?
 2. Do you agree that the past set the stage for a host of injustices in our time? If so, how?
 3. The goal is not prosperity; it is to collaborate with God in making God's grace and love real in our world. How do you respond?
- Choose from the following optional ideas to explore the Scripture:
 1. Brainstorm ways that a person might be unintentionally involved in acts of injustice. Encourage participants to reflect on their lives to determine if they are in any way perpetuating injustice.
 2. Set up a classroom debate on this topic: "Resolved: That God's vindication of the righteous and faithful will be physical, not spiritual." Form two teams of volunteers to debate, with the remaining persons to act as audience. Allow a few minutes for teams to research scriptural backup, then allow each team a designated amount of time for presenting their case and for rebuttal. Debrief the debate together.

Closing Worship

7. Morning Prayer 2

Worship Leaflet, lesson 9

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet.
- Enlist volunteers to lead remaining portions of morning prayer.
- Begin with Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession, say the Lord's Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.
- Extinguish the Christ candle.
- Bless participants individually as they leave, saying, "*(Name)*, go forth and put love into action—especially for the least of these."

A LOOK AHEAD

DAILY BIBLE READINGS			
M	Apr. 27	God Promises Restoration of Israel's Fortunes	Deut. 30:1-6
T	Apr. 28	God Will Shepherd the People	Ezek. 34:11-16
W	Apr. 29	God Will Strengthen the People	Zech. 10:6-12
T	Apr. 30	Christ's Forgiveness of Israel's Sins	Acts 5:27-32
F	May 1	Leaders, Priests, and Prophets Don't Listen	Zeph. 3:1-7
S	May 2	God Will Preserve a Remnant	Zeph. 3:8-13

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Suggesting that as they read the daily Bible readings, they note where God's future promises emerge and where obedience to God's way is underscored.
2. Encouraging them to reflect on how the most solemn promises we make, in our daily living and in our faith life, are future oriented. How are we living faithfully into the future?