

A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS, A HOLY NATION

Daily Bible Readings			
M	Feb. 24	Rev. 1:3–8	We Are Priests
T	Feb. 25	Ps. 106:36–48	Give Thanks to God’s Holy Name
W	Feb. 26	Lev. 19:1–10	Be Holy
Th	Feb. 27	Lev. 19:11–18	Love Your Neighbor as Yourself
F	Feb. 28	Rev. 20:1–6	Priests of God and Christ
Sa	Mar. 1	Mic. 6:1–8	Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly

MAIN IDEA

Yahweh calls the people a “treasured possession,” a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Exodus 19

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

“Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.” (Exod. 19:5b–6)

PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself as leader. Reflect on lesson 1, “A Kingdom of Priests, a Holy Nation,” (Participant’s Book, p. 1).
- Familiarize yourself with the context of the Scripture as it precedes the giving of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20.
- Provide Bibles, Participant’s Books, Worship Leaflets for lesson 1, name tags, paper, and pens. Use an internet-connected device to show videos.
- Obtain a white pillar candle, as well as a means to light it.
- Step 6 offers additional options from which to choose.

LEADING THE LESSON

Opening Worship

1. Gathering

- Greet participants and provide name tags. Invite participants to identify the groups and communities of which they are a part. How did they come to belong to these groups?
- Distribute Bibles, Participant's Books, and Worship Leaflets for lesson 1.
- Formulate and get consensus on some simple ground rules for the study (for example, welcoming diverse points of view, maintaining confidentiality, and so on).

2. Morning Prayer 1

Worship Leaflet, lesson 1

- Light the candle, noting that it is a tangible reminder of the presence of the risen Christ.
- Encourage participants to settle into silence.
- Invite volunteers to lead portions of Morning Prayer from the Worship Leaflet, beginning with the Opening Sentences and ending after the Hymn.

Teaching Tip
God's call and covenant unite God's people with an identity, a relationship, and a mission. Following the sea crossing in the Exodus event, God's people wandered the wilderness for forty years. God's presence accompanied these nomadic people, leading them through the wilderness, calling them a royal priesthood, establishing a covenant with them and remaining faithful to it. Rituals, offerings, and obedience to God's laws help the people to come to know who they are and whose they are. Their responses to God in their worship and sacrifices unite them in God's presence and strengthen them to bear witness to their one true God.

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 19:1–14

19:1 On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. ²They journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. ³Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the Israelites: ⁴‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now, therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, ⁶but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.”

⁷So Moses went, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸The people all answered as one, “Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do.” Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. ⁹Then the LORD said to Moses, “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after.”

When Moses had told the words of the people to the LORD, ¹⁰the LORD said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes ¹¹and prepare for the third day, because on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ¹²You shall set limits for the people all around, saying, ‘Be careful not to go up the mountain or to touch the edge of it. Any who touch the mountain shall be put to death. ¹³No hand shall touch them, but they shall be stoned or shot with arrows; whether animal or human being, they shall not live.’ When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain.” ¹⁴So Moses went down from the mountain to the people. He consecrated the people, and they washed their clothes.

Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

Bible Study

3. Scripture Reading

Participant’s Book, p. 2

- Invite two volunteers to read aloud the parts of the narrator and God in Exodus 19. Other participants read together the lines of the people.
- Option: Read Exodus 19. Show the YouTube video “The Book of Exodus—Part 2” (Torah Series) up to 1:50 (bit.ly/TPWTorahSeries) summarizing Exodus 19 as a bridge between Exodus’s first and second parts. Invite participants to discuss insights gained from the video.

- Option: Read Exodus 19:1–14. Discuss how verses 4–7 form the central message of this passage. Encourage participants to memorize Exodus 19:4–6 by reading the three verses aloud, then challenge them to silently repeat the single verses from memory ten times each.

4. **The Call to Be a Covenant Community** Participant’s Book, p. 3

- Discuss with participants the ways the communities they belong to shape their lives. Ask: What difference does it make to you that you belong to the community that is the church?
- Mount Sinai was the sacred space where God’s presence dwelt. Invite participants to identify particular spaces or places that remind them of God’s presence. Name the feelings they experience when they are in God’s presence.
- Read together the first two paragraphs in “The Call to Be a Covenant Community” on page 3 in the Participants’ Book. Discuss how the events described during the people’s wilderness experience helped to form them into a community. Why was community-building essential for God’s people during this time?
- The author writes, “The foundation of this covenant community was much deeper than any shared interest or common heritage. It was the call of God.” Discuss the distinction between shared interest, common heritage, and call of God in forming a community of faith.
- Read Genesis 12:1–3 and Deuteronomy 4:1–9. What is the purpose behind God’s covenant with Israel? Where does the authority come from? What is implied in the covenant about God’s desire? What is the role of a priest in this context? What does it look like to do the work of God?

5. **Joining in God’s Reconciling Work** Participant’s Book, p. 4

- Discuss with participants: How do you prepare yourself to encounter God? What difference do your preparations make in the way you relate with God and with others?
- Explore the vision presented in Exodus 19 of a life that is possible when we devote ourselves to the relationships we share with God and with each other.
- Reflect on the Reformation principle that all baptized believers are called to be priests—we are all priests to and for each other. The priest’s duty was to represent the people (the world) before God through prayer, supplication, and sacrifice. How do you and your congregation exercise the duties of the priesthood?

- God's priests are also called to represent Christ and to mediate God's grace in the world. How can you mediate God's grace to one another? To others who know Christ? To those who do not have a relationship with God or Jesus?
- The word *liturgy* comes from a Greek word meaning "work of the people." Do you consider worship in a community to be ministry or faithful work? Defend your response.

6. Stepping into the World

Participant's Book, p. 5

- What happens in worship at your church that helps you encounter God? How does worshipping with others in your church affect your relationship with them?
- Discuss the casual way many Christians approach worshipping God.
 1. How does Exodus 19 inform your approach to worship?
 2. Brainstorm ways to express devotion to God as informed by Exodus 19, such as participating in the communal practices of the church and examining the habits of your hearts.
- The author describes a variety of holy worship spaces that are special, holy, set apart.
 1. What makes your worship space holy?
 2. In what other spaces have you been aware of God's presence?
 3. What enables you to encounter God there?
- Yahweh calls the people of Israel to prepare in order to receive the covenant. How do you prepare? Create a washing ritual as preparation for weekly worship, symbolically reconnecting you to the covenant, saying "I am baptized" or "I am a child of God" as you scrub your face.

Closing Worship

7. Morning Prayer 2

Worship Leaflet, lesson 1

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet, and enlist volunteers to lead remaining portions of Morning Prayer.
- Begin with the Prayer of the Day, pray the Lord's Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.
- Bless and challenge participants as they leave, saying, "*(Name)*, you are God's own, carry God's presence with you."
- Extinguish the candle.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes from the Uniform Series provide additional information about today's Scripture.

1. When Yahweh called Moses to go to Pharaoh, Yahweh promised that the people would “worship God on this mountain” (Exod. 3:12). Israel was set free to worship God.
2. The covenant (*berit*) is a binding legal agreement (contract). It can refer to transactions in a wide variety of contexts, including personal (Gen. 31:44), familial (1 Sam. 20:16; Mal. 2:14), business (Jer. 34:8–10), and international settings (Josh. 9:6; 1 Kgs. 15:19). The basic form of Yahweh's covenant with Israel is found in Exodus 19:4–6.
3. In the ancient Near East, a king is a treasured possession of his own god. He is personally chosen, blessed, and protected by that deity. Israel was to be Yahweh's treasured possession, serving God as a nation of priests (Hebrew *kohanim*).
4. As a kingdom of priests, Israel is set apart from other nations to serve God, just as Aaron and his sons are consecrated for a particular kind of service in the tabernacle. (Exod. 28:41.)

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Encouraging them to use centering prayer as a regular practice of entering into God's presence.
2. Challenging them to make a calendar of their week and fill in all their activities. Set aside sacred or holy time to spend with God.