



Session 1
Winter 2015–16
Primary

The path to God's promise

JEREMIAH 33:14–16; PSALM 25

prepare



PRAYER

Loving and steadfast God, this world is filled with troubles. Give me hope as I wait for your justice and mercy. Amen.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

To hear the people's hopes for a righteous leader

STORY SUMMARY

Today's texts accompany the first Sunday of Advent. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God promises to bring a righteous "branch" from the line of David. The prophet spoke of God's promise to provide a leader for Jerusalem. This leader would set things right and save the land. Psalm 25 speaks of trust and waiting for God. The people sang that they trusted in God, followed God's paths, and waited for God's forgiveness, teaching, friendship, relief, and deliverance.

teaching tips for primary

Primary children are sensitive to what is right and fair. They will understand the Israelites' wishes for a good leader who would set things right. Encourage the children to also see that as we wait for God's justice, there are things we can do to help set things right in our daily lives.

Bring in a miniature Christmas tree or stand several branches in a large pot. Children will tie ribbons onto the branches as part of Spiritual practice during sessions 1–4.

Copy the poster pieces from pages 92–93 in this guide. Use removable putty adhesive to affix them to the "Waiting for Jesus" poster from the poster pack. Refer to instructions on page 92.

Make copies of the Letter to families from page 104 in this guide. This letter gives an overview of the quarter as well as where to find the Bible stories in *Shine On: A Story Bible*. Send one letter home with each child.

Decide which Explore activities you will do, and check Supplies and To do throughout the session to see what needs to be prepared.

The faithfulness of God

Jeremiah 33 is set during the time when the Babylonians were laying siege to Jerusalem (598–597 BCE). In this chapter, Jeremiah predicts that God will restore God's people to the land, restore their prosperity, and restore a king to the throne of David. Jeremiah is told that a descendant of David will once again rule God's people with justice and righteousness.

Verse 3 is crucial for understanding the thread of this chapter. The word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah, saying, "Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known." What Jeremiah does not know is that, despite the present crisis and later exile, God will eventually restore the fortunes of God's people. In spite of their unfaithfulness, God will prove to be faithful.

God's overarching commitment contrasts dramatically with the chaos that Jeremiah and Jerusalem were experiencing. Earlier, Jeremiah used the phrase "the Lord is our righteousness" in reference to a coming king (23:6). In this week's text the phrase is applied to the city of Jerusalem. This underscores the connection between the coming king and his people. Despite present circumstances, God assures the people that in the days to come they will dwell secure and safe in the land: "In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety" (33:16a).

The Branch is a title that is used in other places in the Bible to refer to a messiah.¹ *Branch* means "a royal successor"; it is a poetic term for the heir of a dynastic line. Neighboring nations used this same term for an heir to the throne who rules justly. In Jeremiah's time, the dynasty of David appeared to have come to an end. On the face of it, God's promise had failed. But here God boldly reaffirms this pledge. A Christian understanding of this promise has been that Jesus is the Messiah who will inherit David's throne and establish God's kingdom through faithfulness and righteousness.²



The structure of Psalm 25

Psalm 25 is a remarkable blend of wisdom and lament, asking for wise guidance and for deliverance. It is an alphabetical poem, with each new line starting with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is structured according to an inverted parallelism: it introduces all its themes and then returns to them in reverse order. For example, in both verses 1 and 22, the psalmist calls upon God. Verses 2–3 and 19–21 plead for salvation from enemies and from shame. Verses 4–5 and 16–18 speak of following God's path and waiting for God's salvation. Verses 6–7 and 11–15 speak of God's covenant love. The central

verses (8–10) of this psalm emphasize the steadfast love that guides one on a just path:

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

Singing of God's love

The entire psalm speaks of God's loving and faithful character. As in the promise to Jeremiah, the psalmist says that God no longer remembers people's sins. Despite the psalmist's sense of guilt and fear, God's love and faithfulness will win the day.

In the Gospels we hear Jesus announcing the fulfillment of God's covenant promise. With the advent of Jesus, God's long anticipated reign of justice and righteousness shall be realized. God will not leave people without a leader; the son of David has come to inherit the throne. That which the prophet foresaw and the psalmist longed for shall come to pass in unexpected and wondrous ways.

1. Jeremiah 23:5–6; Isaiah 4:2; 11:1–5; Zechariah 3:8; and 6:12.

2. Luke 1:32–33 (see also 2 Samuel 7:12–16).

gather

supplies

- *Shine Songbook and CD*
- *Year Two Songbooks* (optional)
- CD player
- Small tree (miniature Christmas tree or branch in flowerpot)
- Pieces of ribbon (one per person)
- Candle
- Matches

poster pack

- Bible memory poster (Luke 1)

to do

- Practice the American Sign Language for *God* and *break*, described on page 91 in this guide.
- Cut lengths of narrow ribbon that a child could easily tie onto a tree branch.

media connections

- *Circles of Hope* by Karen Lynn Williams
- "Canticle of the Turning" song by Rory Cooney, which begins "My soul cries out . . ."
- *Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom* by Carole Boston Weatherford
- *Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem* painting by Rembrandt van Rijn

BUILD COMMUNITY

Greet the children by name. Ask children to talk about various roads or paths they traveled on this week. Tell children that wherever we go, we find or make a path. We go around obstacles or change our speed. Sometimes we have to ask others to help us along the way. Today's Bible passage talks about God's paths. It tells of the people's desire for someone to lead them and help them with things that had gone wrong.

WORSHIP TOGETHER

Light a candle as you sing verse 1 of "Hope Is a Light" (track 9, page 16 in the *Year Two Songbook*).

Lead a prayer asking God to bless your time together.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Gather the group around a small tree, such as a miniature Christmas tree or branches in a flowerpot. Invite children to think about or name a situation at school or home that is hard or seems unfair. Give each child a ribbon to tie or drape on the tree to represent their concern. Demonstrate how to do this in a quiet, prayerful way. Showing is more important than telling.

Close with a prayer.

Loving God, there are hard and sad things in our world and in our lives. We need your help. Be close to us. Amen.

teaching tip

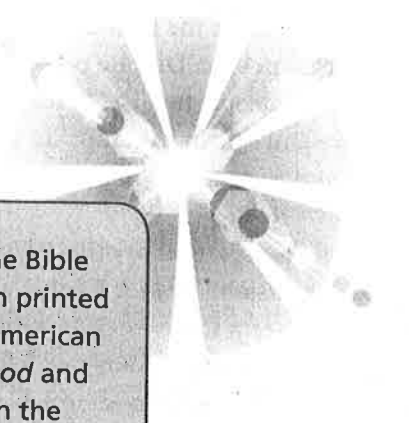
Sessions 1–4 include candle lighting during Worship together. This is a common Advent tradition in many churches. Don't worry if you don't have a "real" Advent wreath; simply setting out the specified number of candles is still effective.

Bible memory

Introduce the first section of the Bible memory verse. Read the section printed here and then teach children American Sign Language for the words *God* and *break*. The signs are pictured on the Bible memory poster and described on page 91 in this guide. Practice the verse and signs several times.

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us.

—Luke 1:78



experience

SHARE THE STORY

Explain that there are two parts to the Bible story. One (Jeremiah 33) is a message from God for the people, spoken by a prophet named Jeremiah. The other (Psalm 25) is a song that the people sang to God. Show each chapter in the Bible. *Option:* Show a picture of the Rembrandt painting listed in Media connections.

Lay a length of ribbon on the floor with one end next to the tree from Spiritual practice. Place one story figure next to the tree to represent the “ruler.” Place several story figures at the other end of the ribbon “path” to represent the people of Israel. Touch the “ruler” story figure and the tree when they are mentioned. Move the people figures along the ribbon “path” each time the story references God’s ways or paths.

Read the story from page 144 in *Shine On*.

WONDER AND REFLECT

Use the following questions to reflect on the Bible story together.

- I wonder how a leader can be like a tree branch.
- I wonder why God didn’t answer the people right away.
- I wonder how God shows us what is right.
- Imagine feeling lonely and sad. (*pause*) Imagine God turning to you with kindness.

Remove two poster pieces from the upper left corner of the “Waiting for Jesus” poster to reveal the picture of the sun and the path. Say, “Imagine walking on a path of love.”

PEACE NOTES

The people in the Bible were waiting for God to come and fix things. We still wait for God to come and set things right, but many times we have important ways to help.

Have the children look at the pictures on page 2 in the Primary leaflet as you read the captions. Ask:

How did Harriet help to change something wrong?

How can you help when something wrong is happening? (*Point to the pictures on page 3 of the leaflet.*) **What could you do if someone was being bullied? If you saw litter in the park? If you accidentally broke something?**

Children can draw their responses on page 3 now or during Explore.

teaching tip

There are various ways to use *Shine On*. Have a child hold *Shine On* for the group to see as you tell the story and move the props. Or, show the *Shine On* illustration, then lay the book beside you so that you can glance at the words as you tell the story.



The path to God’s promise

Jeremiah 33:14–16;
Psalm 25

supplies

- Bible
- *Shine On: A Story Bible*
- Primary leaflets
- Harriet Tubman story (from Additional resources; optional)
- Pencils and crayons or markers
- “Waiting for Jesus” poster pieces (from Additional resources)
- Removable putty adhesive

storytelling props

- Small tree
- Ribbon

poster pack

- “Waiting for Jesus” poster
- Story figures

to do

- Post the “Waiting for Jesus” poster from the poster pack.
- Copy and cut out the “Waiting for Jesus” poster pieces from pages 92–93 in this guide and affix them to the poster as described on page 92 using removable putty adhesive.

teaching tip

For older children: As children look at the pictures on page 2 of the Primary leaflet, read a more extensive story from page 90 in this guide or read the book about Harriet Tubman listed in Media connections.

Extend the conversation about page 3: Not all things that are wrong have the same importance. Talk with older children about the difference between bullying and breaking something, for example. Which is more important to set right?

explore

CREATE

Children can create a tree by connecting the dots in any order on page 4 of the Primary leaflet. Color the finished tree. Wonder together about how a leader could spring up like a branch on a tree.

supplies

- Primary leaflets
- Pencils
- Crayons or colored pencils

MOVE

Play a game to think about God's promise to set things right in Jerusalem. Set some stacking blocks at one end of the room, and use a few to start a small tower. As you read phrases from the story, ask children to think about whether the phrase sounds like building up or tearing down. One child at a time will go to the blocks and either add a block to the tower or take down a block, based on the phrase you say. Possible phrases include: "I will keep my promise," "The people of Jerusalem will be safe," "A ruler will spring up like a branch on a tree," "I lift my soul to you, O God," "My enemies laugh at me," "I am lonely and sad," and "May justice and goodness save me." Divide larger groups into teams.

supplies

- Blocks

RETELL

Set out a copy of *Shine On*, open to page 144, for children to reference. Children can choose a part of the story that they like and use play dough to represent that portion. If there is time and interest, have children show their creations to the rest of the group. A play dough recipe can be found at www.ShineCurriculum.com/Extras.

supplies

- *Shine On: A Story Bible*
- Play dough



other ideas

- Psalms were usually sung. Make up your own tune or play tapping rhythms as you say some of the words of Psalm 25.
- All God's paths are love. Lay yarn on the floor to create one or more paths, ideally in a large space. Set a pile of paper hearts at the far end. Children can slowly walk on the yarn path, pick up a heart, and return to the start.

LEAFLET

Use the picture clues to fill in the blanks on page 1 of the Primary leaflet. Read the Bible story: "The time is coming when a ruler will spring up like a **branch** on a **tree**. God, remember the **love** you have shown your **people**. All the **paths** of the Lord are **love**." *Tip:* Write the answer words on a card so pre-readers can find the correct word and copy the letters.

supplies

- Primary leaflets
- Pencils
- Cue cards for pre-readers (optional)

bless

PRAY

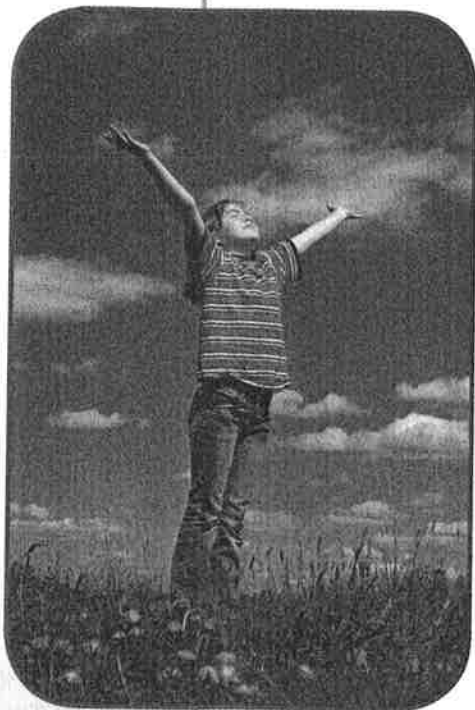
Gather near the tree. Sing “Dios de la esperanza” (May the God of Hope), track 5, page 10 in the *Year Two Songbook*.

SEND

Read these words paraphrased from Psalm 27:14 as a blessing for each child.

Be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

Make sure to send leaflets home with the children. Send home a copy of the Letter to families from page 104 in this guide with each child.



supplies

- Primary leaflets
- *Shine Songbook and CD*
- *Year Two Songbooks* (optional)
- CD player
- Copies of Letter to families (from Additional resources)

We set up a labyrinth at the beginning of the Advent season. At the center of the labyrinth, each child receives a blessing and a candle to hold and place on the labyrinth path.

—Lisa Carr-Pries
Waterloo, Ontario

leader's closing prayer

God, as I wait for your justice to come, help me to see ways I can create change and spread your love. Amen.