

A Light and a Hope

LESSON

1

LESSON AIM

To help kids see that ★ through faith in Jesus they are a light to all nations.

OBJECTIVES

Kids will

- ✓ play a game of Battle of the Blowers,
- ✓ review the history of Israel,
- ✓ discover their role in God's promise to be blessing to all nations, and
- ✓ create an apple candleholder to celebrate sharing God's light.

YOU'LL NEED

- masking tape
- pingpong ball
- battery-lit candle
- Bible
- red apples*
- sturdy plastic knives
- sprigs of pine (fresh or artificial)
- pencils
- taper candles
- lighter
- photocopies of the "Pine-Apple Candleholder" handout (p. 17)

**Always check for allergies before serving snacks.*

BIBLE BASIS

Psalm 118

Israel was a tiny nation at the crossroads of territory contested by international superpowers. After the heydays of David and

Solomon, Israel became a pawn, tossed for centuries between the Babylonians, Persians, Egyptians, Greeks, and finally the Romans. Some conquerors let them keep their national identity and worship God in the ways set down in the Torah, the five books of Moses. Others, to spread their particular culture, worked to wipe out Judaism, burning all known copies of the Torah, executing priests and desecrating the Temple. During this era, many Jews lost the ability to speak and read Hebrew.

God's people, who conquered Canaan under Joshua and began such a hopeful journey, ended up being swept about on the stormy seas of international politics. Yet, they never forgot God's promise that a king from the line of David would rule in Jerusalem forever. Psalm 118 recalls God's goodness in the past and prophesies his goodness in the future with a triumphant king returning to Jerusalem amidst the waving of boughs and cries of "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

The sheer number of Psalms that point to the coming of Christ is amazing. We begin the season of Advent with Israel's troubled history, their hope in God's faithfulness, and foreshadowing of a coming king, the likes of whom history had never seen.

1 Peter 2:9

When God began his relationship with Abraham and called him out of Ur into an unknown land, it was to establish a special people, a holy people who would be a light to all the nations. The Torah, the five books of Moses, lay out how they were to live. After that, the books of Judges, Kings, and Chronicles tell their struggles, their coming together under earthly kings, and peril from empires without and idol worship within. The prophets write of longing to return to the homeland after Jerusalem's destruction.

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus let all who believe in him gain full and free adoption into this honored family. We who believe are now the light carriers. What an honor. What a joy!

UNDERSTANDING YOUR KIDS

With this lesson we turn from Thanksgiving to Advent. We've been celebrating God's amazing gifts to us while, in truth, kids have been eyeing what they'll put on their Christmas lists!

During this season it's a challenge to get kids to focus on God, whose glorious abundance of gifts to us culminates with the unmatched gift of his Son. The parade of Christmas programs and parties easily overshadows the true marvel of the season: that God's faithfulness to us began at Creation, continues throughout the seasons of planting and harvest, and takes on the whole new aspect of God with us as we look forward to the coming of our Savior. Use this lesson to help kids realize this truth!

The Lesson

ATTENTION GRABBER

Battle of the Blowers

Lay two masking tape lines about one and a half yards apart. Each line should be long enough to accommodate half the kids.

Say: **Today we're going to begin with the Battle of the Blowers. Everybody puff out your cheeks for me so I can see that you're nice and full of air.**

Puff out your own cheeks to show them what you mean and to get a good laugh from the kids.

Say: **Good job! I'm going to choose three championship blowers to stand on this masking tape line.** Choose any three kids to stand on one line. **The rest of you, please stand on the opposite line.**

Place a pingpong ball between the two lines.

Say: **This game is very simple. The goal is to blow the ball across the other team's line. You can blow from your knees or your bellies, whichever position you think will give you the best advantage.**

If kids begin to complain that the team of three is at a great disadvantage, ignore them, or remind them that there are championship blowers on that team.

Say: **No one blow until I say "blow."** Allow kids to position themselves; then pause a few moments to build the tension. **Ready...set...blow!**

When the team with more kids wins quickly, say: **Let's have a rematch! I'm sure our championship blowers will win this time.**

Repeat this two or three times. Then sit down with the kids and act puzzled.

Say: **I don't get it. We had some great championship blowers over here, but they couldn't seem to win. I must've set up the game wrong. Maybe I should have put the lines further apart.**

Let the kids respond.

Say: **Okay, here's what we'll do.**

Choose three kids from the larger team to stay where they are. Send the rest of the team over to join the three championship blowers. Play the game once more and give a big cheer when the championship blowers finally win. Then join the kids on the floor.

Say: **Strangely enough, this game reminds me a lot of today's Bible story. You see, the nation of Israel was a very**

small nation. But there were huge kingdoms all around it. It was kind of like our team of three against everyone else. First one empire would conquer Israel, then another, and then another. They were just too small to stand against any of the world powers of ancient times. But they never gave up. They had a secret hope. And I'm going to let you in on that secret hope in just a minute.

Collect the pingpong ball and gather the kids in a large story circle.

BIBLE STUDY

A Light to All Nations (Psalm 118; 1 Peter 2:9)

Gather kids in a circle. Say: It's important to know a little history of Israel so we can understand the promises God made to his people and be ready for Jesus' coming.

It all started when God called Abraham to go to a new land. I need someone to be Abraham. Have "Abraham" sit in the center of the circle. Abraham had a wife named Sarah. Who will be Sarah? Have "Sarah" join "Abraham." After many long years they had a son named Isaac. Have an "Isaac" sit in the center.

Now this might seem like a small start for a nation, but listen to this promise God made to Abraham. God told Abraham to look up and count the stars in the sky. There are way too many stars in the sky to count, aren't there?

Say: God promised that someday his family would be larger than all the stars! There was another, even more important promise God made to Abraham: God said, "Through your family, all the nations of the world will be blessed." That's the secret hope I was talking about earlier. Whatever happens in our story, I want you to remember that secret hope!

Then Isaac grew up and had twins named Jacob and Esau. Invite two more kids to the center of the circle. And so Abraham's family grew and grew until it was a whole nation, the nation of Israel, just as God promised.

But other nations were much, much larger. There were nations that were so huge they swallowed up other nations. Like Egypt, for instance. It was bigger than many, many Israels put together. At one time, because of a drought, everyone from Abraham's family lived in Egypt. They became slaves. Life was hard.

Have the kids in the outer circle stand, stomp around the "Israelites" in the center of the circle once, and sit back down.

Say: God set the Israelites free from the Egyptians. Eventually he helped them conquer and build the land of Israel

Teacher Tip

You might play a CD of soft, instrumental music as kids draw. Soothing background music increases kids' ability to concentrate during quiet, thoughtful activities such as this one.



that looks something like the Israel we know today. There were times when Israel loved God and worshipped him and shined a light to all the nations, just as God planned.

Give the Israelite group a battery-lit candle.

The book of Psalms records the songs the Israelites sang to God. I'm going to read part of one. It has a part for a reader and a part for a group to answer. You'll be the answering group. Here's your part: His love continues forever.

Have the kids repeat the response until you're sure they have it.

Say: Now I'm going to read from Psalm 118. Each time I pause, you answer by saying, "His love continues forever." Let kids practice. Everyone please stand in honor to God as we perform a version of this psalm together.

Thank the Lord because he is good;

His love continues forever.

Let the people of Israel say:

"His love continues forever."

Let the family of Aaron say:

"His love continues forever."

Let those who respect the Lord say:

"His love continues forever."

Thank you; you may sit down.

Then the great kingdom of Assyria rose in the east. Their armies threatened Israel. But Israel still hoped in God. Have the Israelites in the middle hold up their candle while the outside circle stomps around them one time and then sits down.

The Egyptians threatened Israel and made them pay heavy taxes. Once again, have the Israelites in the middle hold up their candle; have those in the outside circle stomp around the Israelites one time and then sit down.

Next, the Babylonians came and destroyed the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. They took many Israelites captive. Repeat the same process as above.

Say: Now all of you can sit together in the middle. Throughout history the same thing happened over and over. After the Babylonians came the Persians, then the Greeks, and finally at the time of Jesus' birth, the Romans. But the Israelites always remembered their secret hope that they would be a blessing to all the nations.

Signal one of the inner circle of Israelites to stand up and hold the candle.

Listen to some other parts of Psalm 118 that tell this part of Israel's story. I hope you remember your line, because that's how the Psalm ends.

I will not die, but live,
and I will tell what the Lord has done.
The Lord has taught me a hard lesson,
but he did not let me die.
God bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
We bless all of you from the Temple of the Lord.
The Lord is God, and he has shown kindness to us.
With branches in your hands, join the feast.
Come to the corners of the altar.
Thank the Lord because he is good...
His love continues forever.

Say: Through everything that happened, God's people knew that he was with them and that they would be a light to all the nations. ★ Our faith in Jesus means we are a light to all nations, too. And now I have a great surprise for you!

LIFE APPLICATION

Pine-Apple Candleholders

Have kids form groups of four. On a table set out large red apples, sturdy plastic knives, pencils, sprigs of fresh or artificial pine, candles, and copies of the "Pine-Apple Candleholder" handout.

Say: Choose one carrier from your group to bring an apple for each person, one to bring pencils and handouts, one to bring sprigs of pine, and one to bring candles and knives.

Say: If you look at the Bible verse on your handout, you'll find the surprise I promised you.

Ask someone to read aloud 1 Peter 2:9. Then ask:

◆ Who is the "you" in this verse? (God's people; the Israelites; I'm not sure.)

Say: That's the surprise. The "you" in this verse is you! All of you sitting here with me in this room. All of us who believe in Jesus! You see, Jesus came to Earth to invite everyone to be part of God's family. When we put our faith in Jesus, God adopts us into his ancient family and we become the carriers of God's light. ★ Our faith in Jesus means we are a light to all nations. Isn't that awesome? Ask:

◆ Why do you think we decorate our homes during Christmas? (Because we are the light; because Jesus is the light; because it's pretty.)

◆ How can we be the light of Jesus ourselves? (We can do good things; we can act like Jesus.)

Say: During the Christmas season we decorate our homes with lights to celebrate the fact that Jesus is coming. As believers in Jesus, we carry his light in our hearts, too. As a

Teacher Tip

So there isn't a scramble for supplies, call out the items one at a time and have the carriers bring them back to their groups.



Teacher Tip

You may want to precut holes in the tops of the apples to hold the candles securely.



symbol of the light of hope that Jesus brings to the world, let's make these beautiful candleholders.

Demonstrate how to use a pencil to poke holes near the top of an apple, large enough to accommodate a sprig of pine. Tell kids how many pine sprigs they can use for their decorations. When all the pine sprigs are in place, have kids carefully cut a hole for the candle in the top of the apple with a sturdy plastic knife. If the candle doesn't fit tightly, wrap the bottom with a bit of plastic wrap.

Say: **Candles must always be used with your parents' permission.**

COMMITMENT

Shine God's Light

When Jesus came to Earth, he opened the way for everyone to become a part of God's family. Before, that was a privilege that belonged to the people of Israel. Now it belongs to all of us who put our faith in Jesus. ★ You who believe in Jesus are a light to all the nations!

◆ **What do you think about being part of God's special family?**

◆ **What does it mean to shine God's light?** (That we show others that we trust him; that we tell others about Jesus.)

◆ **How does Jesus' light shine in our lives?** (When we do loving things; when we give thanks to God.)

◆ **When you show your candle decoration to your family, what will you tell them about what you learned today?**

CLOSING

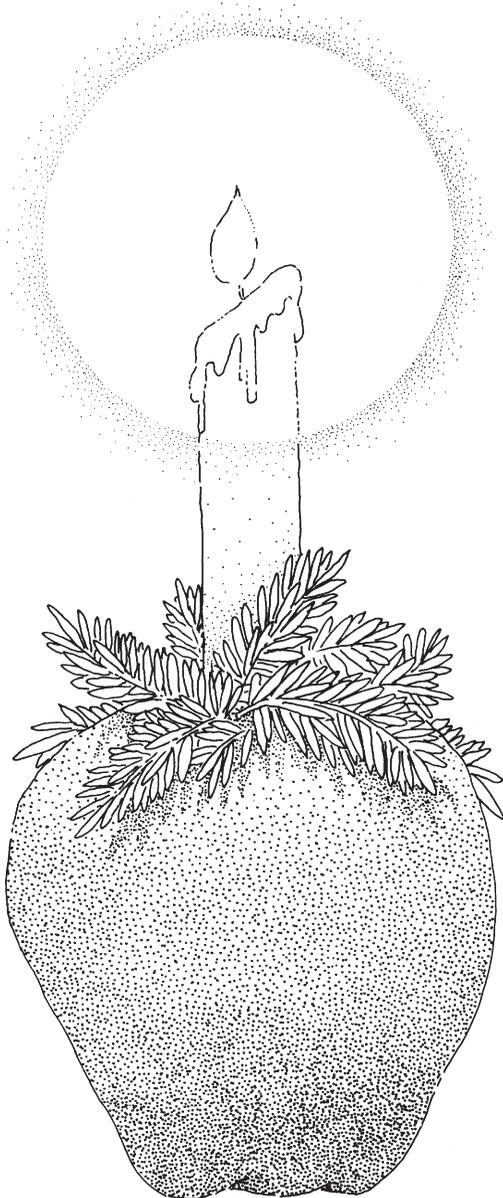
Help Us to Shine

Have kids gather around a table. Place a candle decoration in the center of the table and light it. Ask the kids to join you in prayer.

Dear God, thank you for the beautiful season of lights that's ahead of us. Thank you for including us in your family so that ★ we can be a light to all the nations of the world. Help us to shine with your love this week. In Jesus' name, amen.

Have kids take their candle decorations and their "Pine-Apple Candleholder" handouts.

PINE-APPLE CANDLEHOLDER



But you are a chosen people, royal priests, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. You were chosen to tell about the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. —1 Peter 2:9, NCV

Make a living candleholder with a shiny red apple as the base.

- ◆ Cut a hole around the stem of the apple about 1 inch deep and large enough to hold the base of a taper candle.
- ◆ Use a pencil to poke holes around the top of the apple. Push a sprig of pine into each hole. (The juice from the apple will keep the pine fresh for several days.)
- ◆ Carefully push the candle into its hole. If the hole is a bit too large, wrap the base of the candle with plastic wrap.
- ◆ Enjoy!

Caution: Be careful not to let the candle burn low enough to catch the pine on fire.