

II. Group discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better.*

1. This discussion will compare our identity in Christ to colonists and refugees. What do refugees and colonists have in common? *Both live in a foreign land yet retain the identity of their homeland. Both are influenced by larger issues.*

What is the difference between refugees and colonists? *Colonists often have better resources, but the big difference is mindset – refugees left home against their will, while colonists have an agenda.*

How are Christians in America like refugees? *There was a time when nearly everyone gave lip service to Jesus, but now Christians are marginalized (what we discussed in week 2).*

How are Christians in America like colonists? *We are early adopters – subjects of the coming king. It is our dream that everyone would discover the blessings we enjoy in Christ.*

Read Isaiah 49:1-7 aloud.

2. Who is speaking in verses 1-3? *Israelites, speaking as one person.*

What claim does Israel make in 1-3? *God created me for a purpose.*

What vision did the Israelites have for themselves? *To be a great nation blessed by God.*

What vision did God have for Israel? *Read Gen. 12:2-3. Make you a great nation, bless you, and bless others through you.*

Which part of God's vision for Israel did they tend to forget? *The part about serving others.*

3. In Isaiah 49, how was Israel feeling in verse 4?

What might have led Israelite believers to express such frustration? *Many commentators think the second half of Isaiah addresses the Jews after their nation was destroyed and they were putting the pieces back together.*

In what sense does verse 4 express trust in God, even though God's people are not thriving at the moment?

How were the ancient Israelites like refugees? *We use the term "exiles" for the Jews we meet in books like Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah. But they were refugees and POW's -- removed from home against their will because of war.*

4. As Israel wallows in self-pity, how does God respond (5-7)?

How does 6-7 restore the promise to Abram from Gen. 12? *Re-kindles the vision of a great nation who invites other nations to worship.*

What kind of job does God give Israel? Is this a bigger or smaller burden? *Much bigger, yet no different from his vision at the beginning.*

How could a bigger vision transform Israel from refugees into colonists, wherever they live?

How does it affect you when you are stressed and the burden grows? *It will either kill you or make you rise to the occasion.*

5. What are some ways the church is in a position like ancient Israel? What causes you to feel like we're working hard but losing ground?

How could renewed vision help us to see ourselves as colonists (leaders, early adopters) rather than refugees (cry-baby victims)?

If Isaiah 49 was addressed to us, how would God complete it: "It is too small a thing for you to restore the New Testament church. I will also make you..."

III. Other resources

The point – In a changing world, Christians can feel like refugees because we have lost influence to govern. But we believe God still reigns and these changes could not happen without his permission. Rather than victims, we are colonists who follow the Holy Spirit into the new places where God is working.

Prayer

Praise God as the king and ruler of the universe.

Seek wisdom and courage to follow God into new ways to serve in the world.

Pray for the world – for God to bless people who do not yet love him.

Pray for good things to come to Muslims, Hindus, atheists, money-worshippers, etc., and that they will recognize the source of those blessings.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Imagine that our group has been given a deserted island in the Caribbean to start a new society. Each person tell about one part of life in our new community. Where would we live? How would we feed ourselves? What kind of government would we have?

Read Gen. 12:2-3 aloud.

In what ways was God inviting Abram and his family to start a new society?

When God asked Abram to leave his home, he also made some promises to Abram. Who was supposed to be blessed when Abram obeyed God?

What are some ways that we have been blessed through Abram's obedience?

What parts of Abram's promise hold true for Christians?

God may not give us the same material blessings he gave Abram. But when we serve God, we and everyone around us is blessed.

The Church has Left the Building

Isaiah 49 – Refugees or colonists?

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme for this meeting: **Living as colonists and refugees.**

The Bible class lesson offers some great perspective on joining Jesus “outside the camp” in serving and loving non-Christians. It contrasts discussions in a classroom versus “on the job” training in the world.

To explore these ideas further, this discussion guide takes participants to Isaiah 49. It is a wonderful passage for this theme because it challenged the ancient Israelites to look beyond themselves and recognize how much God loves other people. It fits with the promise to Abraham that God blesses people so that they might be a blessing to others (Gen. 12:2-3).

Leadership tip: Community is vital for people who hope to be different from others. When you try to be faithful in a world that worships other gods, you need supportive peers to give you encouragement, instruction, and wisdom. Your group can serve as such a community, so work to make it a safe place for sharing struggles and questions.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ Where are some places you suspect God is at work in the world? *Habitat for Humanity, Hospice, AA, other groups that serve*
- ❖ What are some ways a church building is a tool for carrying out God's dreams?
- ❖ Agree or disagree – a short-term mission trip makes a bigger spiritual impact on participants than a year's worth of Bible classes.

“The Church has Left the Building” is a series of Small Group guides written in support of the Missional Church curriculum by David Wray and Chris Benjamin. It is designed around the concept of adults discussing material in Bible class and then processing it in small group meetings during the same week. These guides, as well as the Missional Church curriculum, are based on the book, *Treasure in Clay Jars*, by Lois Barrett and others.

Training tools and study guides are at www.collegehills.org, then Ministries, then LIFE groups.