

Aim of lesson

To understand how God has viewed the Jews throughout history and his plans for the future

Bible background

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

Preparation required

You might need to remind yourself about what has happened to the Jews apart from what is recorded in the Bible. Martin Gilbert's book 'The story of Israel' has excellent visual aid material such as posters, charts, letters and copies of documents. There is a table in the students' books with some key dates in Jewish history; if you want to find out more, there is a 'Timeline of Jewish History' in Wikipedia.

Outline of Lesson

The origins of the Jews

Discuss with the class who the Jews are. You could use the family tree in the students' books or get them to draw their own as revision. Seventy members of Abraham's family went into Egypt (Genesis 46:7) but whilst in Egypt they and their descendants became a nation, probably numbering about two million.

We know from verses like Genesis 12:1-3 and 22:17 that the Jews are a chosen people. The Jews of Jesus' time were anxious to remind him of this, for instance in Luke 3:8 and John 8:33. But we also know that not all Abraham's children (Ishmael and those mentioned in Genesis 25:1-5) were included in the promises. Also Esau's descendants were not God's chosen people so that brings us down to Jacob being the father of the Jews. Jacob having his name changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28) gives the Jews their other name of Israelites. The name 'Jew' actually derives from 'Judah', but obviously all the sons were included in the promises.

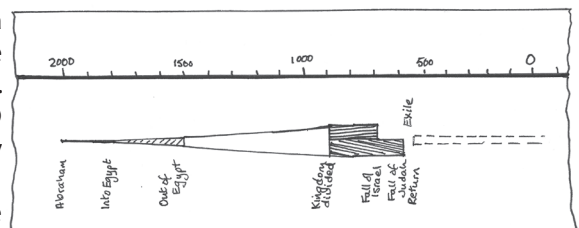
Why were they chosen?

Bring out the fact that the Jews were no bigger or better than any other nation. There was nothing special about them but God chose them (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). God is a faithful God. His love for the Jews isn't going to change. They remain his people, even today.

That is not to say that everything the Israelis do is right, or that we should support all their actions; but they remain God's witnesses in the world - his proof that he is God.

Biblical history

Use the class timeline to revise the history of the Jews. You could draw a line from Abraham which widens out as the nation grows, divides at the end of Solomon's reign and finishes as each nation is taken into captivity. A narrower line could represent the returned nation extending to AD 70. Make sure they know the history as you go through it especially things like AD 70 which they may not have covered before. Some detail will be covered in later lessons so at this point it is best to keep to the main outline.



After AD 70

For us the Jews are a really exciting people to watch because they are God's witnesses. (Isaiah 43:9 - 13) The things that happen to the Jews prove that God exists and that he always keeps his promises. Even though God loves the Jews he has still recorded all the bad things they've done.

Use pictures in the students' books to bring out the idea that a lot of long term prophecies are about the Jews. Get them to look up the verses in the Bible listed in the students' books, and identify which picture represents it. It is clear that many of the prophecies have come to pass since they were written, and those that haven't can reliably be expected to happen in the future. Where the prophecy is still to happen get the students to write the verse, or part of it in one of the empty boxes.

Jeremiah 9:16 - Estimated Jewish population

Deuteronomy 28:65-67 – concentration camp picture¹

Luke 21:24 – map of Jerusalem before 1967

Ezekiel 37:21 – picture of the ship 'Exodus'

Matthew 24:2 – Nicolas Poussin picture

Ezekiel 11:17 – picture of letter confirming state of Israel

Zechariah 14:2 – still to happen!

Zechariah 12:10 – still to happen!

Isaiah 35:10 – still to happen!

Relevance to our lives

The Jews really are God's witnesses. The fact that such a small nation could suffer scattering amongst other nations and being persecuted the way they have but still remain distinct can only be because they are God's people and this is how he determined it.

- It gives us confidence to rely on other things God has told us he will perform.
- Not only that but we can be part of God's plan.
- We can become adopted into God's chosen people through baptism into Christ, which means the promises apply to us as well! Galatians 3:29.

Extension activities

Make a scrap book of newspaper stories about Israel and the Israelis.

¹ You (and the students) may be interested to know that in the photograph of Buchenwald concentration camp, the man on the second row from the bottom, seventh from the left, is Elie Wiesel, a Jew who after liberation won the Nobel Peace prize in 1986.