

Ezra 7-10

Aim of lesson

To show that God is in control of the nations but still cares for individuals.

Background study

Psalms 137; 2 Chronicles 36:15-23; Jeremiah 29:1-14; Ezra 1, 2, 7-8. Map showing places of exile and journey of returning exiles.

Summary of the lesson:

The lesson begins with the nation of Israel captive in Babylon, backtracks briefly to explore how this came about and then concentrates on the exiles returning under the orders of foreign kings, under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Ezra and under the watchful eye of Almighty God. It seeks to draw out lessons about God caring for his nation Israel and for individuals as he works to guide them for their ultimate good. . To make it more child friendly, you could use one of the following activities as an introduction:

- make up virtual rucksacks for a journey
- bring in possible contents or even just pictures to make one up
- think about the preparations we might make for any journey: prayer, plan the route, sort clothes, swimming stuff, sunglasses, cricket bats, books, i-pad, maps, etc; research information about the local area.

Suggested outline of lesson

Taken captive

As an introduction to the lesson, read together Psalm 137:1-6 or better still play a 'you tube' clip by Boney M, 'By the Rivers of Babylon'; find one with words on the screen. Elicit understanding by asking about the mood of the words, use a map to find Babylon, the rivers and Zion. Find out if anyone can suggest how and even why people were taken prisoner. Fill in gaps in their knowledge by briefly explaining how, after many years waiting and hoping for a change in behaviour and attitude, God finally had no choice but to punish the nation of Israel. He chose to do this by allowing the army of Babylon to fight against them, finally destroying Jerusalem and taking away many prisoners. Read from 2 Chronicles 36:15-20, which summarises the fall of Jerusalem. Point out that men, women and children, poor and rich, leaders and priests, all groups were captured. They had to settle down and make lives for themselves under the rule of their enemies.

After 70 years

However, God had a plan for them, as he does for us. Jeremiah records God's promise to them in Jeremiah 29:10-14. Ask the children what it is, as recorded in verse 13, that prompts God to bring the people home again. Also consider how much would have happened

in the 70 years. Do they know anyone who might be around that age? What might have happened to the men, women and children after all that time? Even Babylon itself had been taken over by the Persians and ruled over by a new king called King Cyrus. In Ezra 1:1-4, we read of him issuing his instructions and, in doing so, fulfilling God's promise.

Rebuilding the temple

So some of the people came to the land under the leadership of a man named Zerubbabel. As children often like big numbers and lists, you might like to read with them Ezra 2:64-70, which describes the company of people who came to Jerusalem at that time. Point out that the people who had moved into the land since the Jews had left it, were not at all keen on this group returning. They made life very difficult for them but after quite a long time the temple was in fact rebuilt and there were great celebrations.

Under Ezra

Some 80 years later, another group came from Babylon, this time under Ezra the scribe. The then king issued a decree that can be found in Ezra 7:11-26. Either summarise its essence or read selectively, such as verses 12-16. Share Ezra's response to the king, found in Ezra 7: 27-28. Using Ezra 8, describe the scene at the Ahava canal as they prepared to set out. It would

be helpful to read together verses 21-23 and 31-32, to show how God guided them safely to Jerusalem, where they checked all they had brought and sacrificed offerings to God.

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear God, we are glad that you know the future and will make all the nations do what you want. We are also glad that even though you are so powerful you will watch over us and keep us safe. Amen.

Memory verse

'The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him.' (Ezra 8:22).

Relevance to the children's lives

Discuss with the children where they think God made things happen and why he did. Bring out how everything God did was done for the good of the people. At the beginning of our lesson, we found the people ignoring God but by the time we reached the end, they were praying to him, asking him for help and trusting him to provide that help. Think of times in our lives where God has guided us or someone we know. Can the children think of opportunities they may have in the future when they might want to ask God for help, protection or guidance? Having asked for these things, point out that we must then trust God to provide, just as Ezra did. Finally, if God has plans to establish his worldwide kingdom, and thinking of our lives as a journey, how can we keep focussed on our destination?