

The Chosen Israelites

Listed Scriptures

Deuteronomy 6, 7, 8, 9

Lesson Aim

- 1) That the students may understand what a special privilege it is to be among the chosen ones of God
- 2) That the students may understand and be able to talk about how they should lead their lives as special people of God on this earthly journey

Memory Verse

“For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.” (Deut 7:6)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Deuteronomy 6, 7, 8, 9

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



Archaeological excavations at Palestinian sites provide information about the material culture of biblical times and also allow for some timeline correlation. The Exodus (about 1290 B.C.) coincided with the Late Bronze Age (1500–1200 B.C.). The conquest of Canaan is commonly dated as occurring between 1250 and 1200 B.C., and the period of the Judges continued from 1200 to 1020 B.C. This was the period of the Iron Age (1200–1000 B.C.).

It may seem tedious to learn about the daily lives of the Israelites of this period, especially when the details appear to be mere dry monotonous historical records. As teachers, it is important that we understand the significance of these apparently “minor” details of history. A comprehensive picture of one people, and their relationship with God, requires knowledge of how daily living was carried out. Without

these details, the Israelites would appear to be a mythological people, whose life events happen in a historical and cultural vacuum. It would then be hard to identify with them, whether in their obedience to God or their difficulties and disobedience. If necessary, teachers should explain this significance to the students.

W A R M U P



We have studied and heard about how the Israelites were a special people of God, separated from the rest of the peoples of their time. In terms of their religious and moral codes, how do you think they were different from the others? In terms of the daily aspects of living, do you think they differed from the other peoples of their time? In what ways were they likely similar, and in what ways were they different?

Today, we're going to learn about the lives of the Israelites when they began to settle down in the land of Canaan. We'll see how well our answers to the above questions match what this lesson will show us.

B I B L E S T U D Y



Daily Living

A . Religious Aspects

Monotheism

Following the legacy left by Abraham, the Israelites were monotheists. The Pentateuch reiterated many times the abomination of idol-worship and polytheism. However, in retrospect, we know that not every one of the Israelites kept the faith, as sometimes, they lapsed into idol-worshiping.

Monotheism was a distinctive characteristic that set the Israelites apart from the rest of their neighbors. "For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I

behold him; there, a people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations" (Num 23:9). Religion, culture and identity as a people/nation were one and the same thing for the Israelites. From the time Abraham was called by God out of his homeland of Ur, a special people was already chosen—a unique race belonging to God, knowing God and being taught and guided by Him. This is a special privilege that the Israelites often did not cherish, for they were always distracted by the many different ways of their neighbors and often wanted to be like the other peoples.

The Priesthood

God stipulated that the Levites were the ones to take care of all the affairs regarding worship. "Bring the tribe of Levi near and present them before Aaron, the priest, that they may serve him. And, they shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of meeting, to do the work of the tabernacle" (Num 3:6, 7). From among the Levites, the high priest would be picked to attend to important ceremonies, such as offering the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. From time to time, God would raise prophets through the movement of His Holy Spirit. The prophets acted as the bridge between God and men. As time passed, there were even schools of prophets being set up (2 Sam 2:3-18). In later times, we also see the emergence of scribes. These are the "men of letters," and literally, being the learned ones, they often drafted covenants and letters for the people.

The Feasts

The Israelites kept seven festivals each year – the Passover, Pentecost, Day of Atonement, Feasts of Tabernacles, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits and Trumpets. Adults had to go to the Holy Temple to keep these feasts (cf. Lev 23; Ex 12; Num 29).

The Holy Sabbath

For six days, the Israelites were to work. But the seventh day was the Holy Sabbath day hallowed by God. They had to go to the Levites and teachers of the Law to hear the words of God. On this day, the priests would offer sacrifices in the tabernacle. The people were often found lacking in the observance of the Sabbath, and as a result, the religious leaders started imposing many regulations to prevent them from working on the Sabbath. One example of such a regulation was that they could not even cook on the Sabbath.

B. Moral and Familial Codes

Before they entered the land of Canaan, God instructed the Israelites through the mouth of Moses that close relatives were not to be married (Lev 18:7-18). Marriage with members of the same tribe were, however, encouraged (Num 36; 27:4). They were also instructed specifically not to intermarry with gentiles (Deut 7:3, 4). While there was no explicit instruction about monogamy, it was generally accepted as the norm.

Within a marriage, the husband assumed the role of the head of the household, and the wife belonged to him. Divorce was permitted only in circumstances of sexual immorality (Deut 24:1, 2).

In a family, children were esteemed as an inheritance from God (Ps 127:3). Hence, a barren woman was often seen as cursed by God and despised by society.

On the level of the tribe, the eldest man would be the head of the tribe. Each family would share a tent, with the parents and the unmarried children living together.

C. Daily Practical Living

Nomadic pasturing was one of the main means of livelihood for many of the Israelites. Sheep were the most commonly seen animal, followed by cattle and camels. They built tents where pasture and water could be found. Huge stones were piled up as walls to make sheep pens.

The Israelites also engaged in farming. A considerable area of the land of Canaan had lands that were dry and hard. Often two oxen had to be yoked together to pull the plows. Wheat was the most basic crop. Barley was also commonly cultivated. Among the fruit produce of the land, grapes, olives and figs were the most representative.

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



- 1 In what ways were the Israelites separated as a distinct people from the rest of the peoples?

- 2 List the seven major feasts.
- 3 What were the two most important reasons for keeping the Sabbath (cf. Ex 20:11; Deut 5:15)?
- 4 What were some of the things that the Israelites did for their livelihood?

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



God's Love

An article in the National Geographic entitled "Under His Wings" provides a penetrating picture of God's wings of protection:

After a forest fire in Yellowstone National Park, forest rangers began their trek up a mountain to assess the inferno's damage. One ranger found a bird literally petrified in ashes, perched statuesquely on the ground at the base of a tree. Somewhat sickened by the eerie sight, he knocked over the bird with a stick. When he struck it, three tiny chicks scurried from under their dead mother's wings. The loving mother, keenly aware of impending disaster, had carried her offspring to the base of the tree and had gathered them under her wings, instinctively knowing that the toxic smoke would rise. She could have flown to safety but had refused to abandon her babies. When the blaze had arrived and the heat had scorched her small body, the mother had remained steadfast. Because she had been willing to die, those under the cover of her wings would live. "He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge" (Ps 91:4). Being loved this much so should make a difference in your life. Remember the One who loves you and then, be different because of it.

The story we've just read draws a parallel between the love of God and the love of the mother bird. Indeed, God's love for us is one that brings Him down from His glorious throne to come into the world to save us through His own death. "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows . . . He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities" (Isa 53:4, 5). God loves us so much, that in order to save us from death, He bore our sins and suffered in our stead. It is a love almost unfathomable, and it's so amazing, for God became a human being and died for us!

This message about God’s love is something we have heard so often that we don’t really see its significance anymore. We don’t realize the degree of sacrifice made by God to save us. It has become something we take for granted, like water flowing out of the faucet when we turn it on or like electricity supplied at the flick of a switch. We seldom slow down to think of the sacrifice of God behind the saving grace that we enjoy every moment.

Here is a description of what happens when a human being is crucified. Think of how Jesus Christ suffered for us as a human being, and may God move us to remember His great love for us once again:

What is Crucifixion?

A medical doctor provides a physiological description:

The crossbeam is placed on the ground and the exhausted man is quickly thrown backwards with his shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front of the wrist. He drives a heavy, square wrought iron nail through the wrist deep into the wood. Quickly, he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arm too tightly, but to allow some flex and movement. The beam and the man are then lifted into place on the upright timber. The left foot is pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees flexed. The victim is now crucified.

As he slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain – the nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves. As he pushes himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, he places the full weight on the nail through his feet. Again he feels the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the bones of his feet.

As the arms fatigue, cramps sweep through his muscles, knotting them with deep relentless and throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push himself upward to breathe. Air can be drawn into the lungs but not exhaled. He fights to raise himself in order to get even one small breath.

Finally, carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically, he is able to push himself upward to exhale and bring in life-giving oxygen.

There are hours of limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, and searing pain as tissue is torn from his lacerated back as he moves up and down against rough timber. Then another agony begins: a crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart.

It is now almost over. The loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level. The compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues. The tortured lungs are making frantic efforts to gasp in small gulps of air. He can feel the chill of death creeping through his tissues. Finally, he allows his body to die.

All these, the Bible describes in simple words: “they crucified Him” (Mk 15:24). This is the pain and suffering that God brought upon Himself when He chose to come and die as a human being for us. What wondrous love is this?

Write a paragraph each for the following questions, and then share it with the rest of your class:

1. Knowing that we’re being loved this much should make a difference in our lives – what are some of the things we want to do so our Lord Jesus would not have suffered in vain for us?
2. Have we ever realized the great love behind our election as His special chosen people? What can we do to stand out as His special people in today’s world?
3. In which aspects of our lives and to what extent can we adopt the ways of our peers at school and in society?
4. How can we tell this great story of love to the rest of the world? How do we do it in our immediate spheres of influence, such as our schools and homes?

Teaching Tips

Prompt the students to talk about how they should lead their lives as Christians, in holiness and kindness, at home, in school, in church. Also, ask them what they think they can actively do for God and His kingdom, and for people in the world at large. If the students are shy about speaking aloud concerning their own experiences/thoughts, they can write their responses on a piece of paper, and without writing their names, put the papers into a box. The teacher can then take the pieces of paper out and read to the class what they have each written. Be sure to make this into a discussion, with the teacher facilitating the various input from the students and guiding them in the right path.



"For there is no sorcery against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel. It now must be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'Oh, what God has done!' " (Num 23:23). May the Lord strengthen our faith in His protection for us, for no evil can befall us as long as we remain His people, under His wings. May we also remember to cherish this special status as His people, to live holy lives in order to glorify His name and to spread His blessings to everyone around us.