





## LESSON 4

# I.S.R.**A**.E.L. — **A**liyah (Returning to Israel)

### LESSON OBJECTIVE

This lesson will help Christian children understand that:

1. God promised He would bring His people back to Israel after they had been exiled
2. God always intended the land of Israel to be His people's home
3. Christians can participate in fulfilling God's promise of biblical prophecy today by helping Jewish people make *aliyah*, or immigrate to Israel.

### BIBLE BASIS

Ezra 1:1–11; 2:1–6:22; Ezekiel 34:12–14

### KEY VERSE

*Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back.*

— DEUTERONOMY 30:4

### MEMORY VERSE

*“I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land.”*

— EZEKIEL 34:13

### SUPPLIES NEEDED FOR THIS LESSON

- Suitcase
- World map
- Bibles
- Old magazines
- Scissors
- Glue
- Tape
- Wire coat hangers, one per student
- Five pieces of ribbon per student, preferably white and blue

## Getting Started

### THE “SUITCASE GAME”

Help children to imagine what it might be like to leave their home and make a new home in another country, only being allowed to bring one item with them.

#### Prepare for the game

Have a suitcase that the children can easily pass to one another as they take their turn.

#### As the children come in, have them sit in a circle.

#### Explain to the children:

Has anyone here ever moved from one town to another? Or from one state to another? What did your family take with you?

#### Allow for possible answers such as furniture, pets, clothes, food, TVs, books, toys, etc., then ask your students:

Today we are going to pretend that we are taking a trip to a new country to make a new home with our family. But in our game today, we are only going to be able to take ONE item with us. Think about what one item you would take.

1. To play the game, we are going to pass this suitcase around the circle. The first person will take the suitcase and say, “I am going to a new home and I am going to pack \_\_\_\_\_.”
2. Then that person will pass the suitcase to the next person in the circle, and that person has to say what he or she will bring AND what the first person said, and so on. The very last person to go has to remember ALL the items that each of us packed.
3. One more thing before we start — you cannot say the same item as another student. Each item needs to be different!

Everyone understand? OK, let’s begin!

#### Once the suitcase has made it around the circle, ask the students:

We had a fun time pretending that we could only take one item to a new country, but how hard do you think that would be?

**Allow for answers, then continue:**

I think it would be very hard to do. But do you know what? Many Jewish families today are leaving their homes in countries where it's dangerous for them to live and moving to Israel, and many are only allowed to bring a few items with them.

These families are making what the Jewish people call *aliyah* (al-EE-yah) — which means immigrating or moving to Israel. And that is our next Key to I.S.R.A.E.L. — **A** for **A**liyah!

*Aliyah* helps bring the Jewish people home to Israel from countries all around the world. It helps make happen what God promised His people, who had been kicked out of their homeland by other nations not once, but twice!

**Listen to these verses from the Bible:**

*Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back.* — DEUTERONOMY 30:4

*He will raise a banner for the nations  
and gather the exiles of Israel;  
he will assemble the scattered people of Judah  
from the four quarters of the earth.* — ISAIAH 11:12

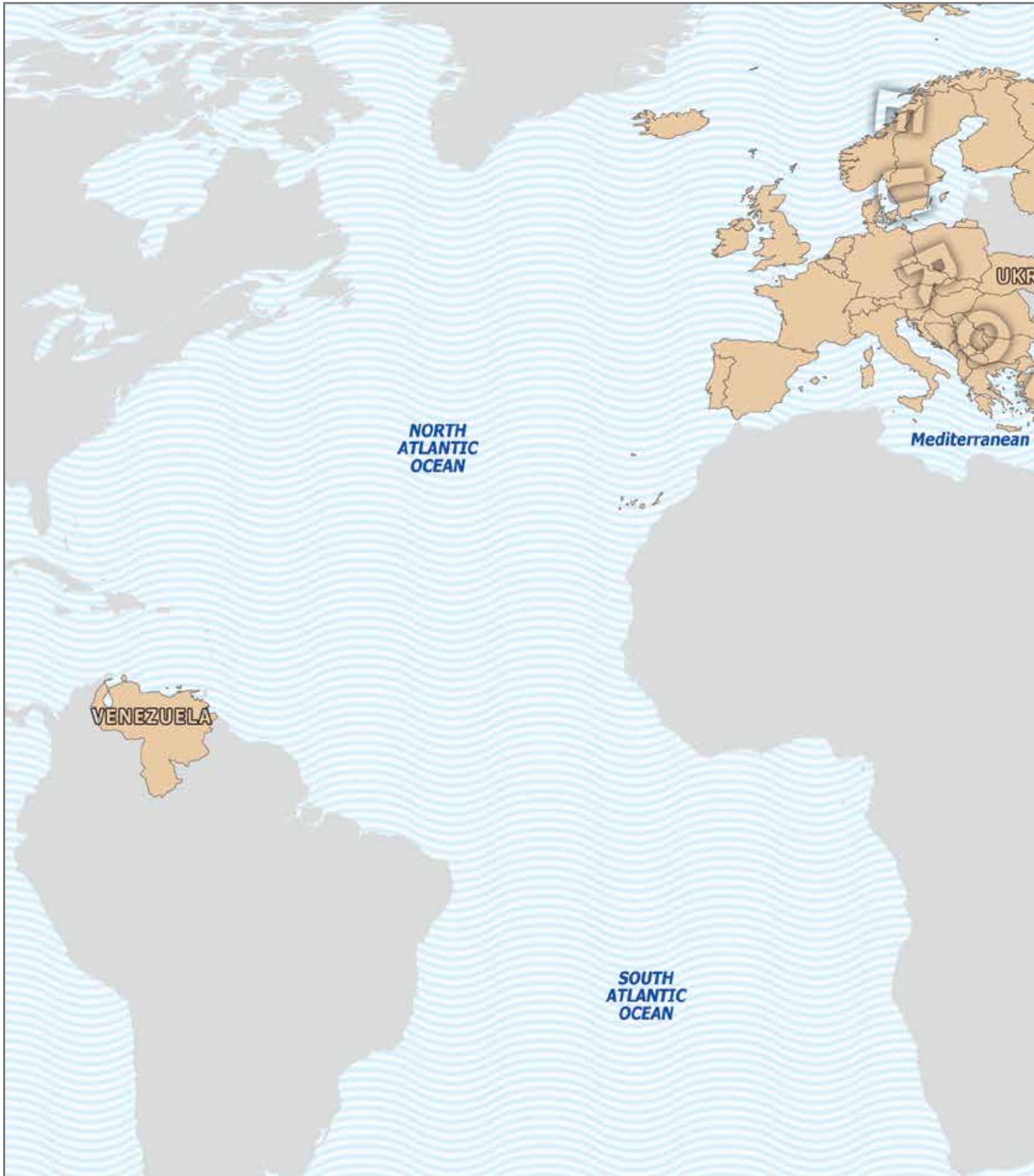
*“Do not be afraid, for I am with you;  
I will bring your children from the east  
and gather you from the west.  
I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’  
and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’*

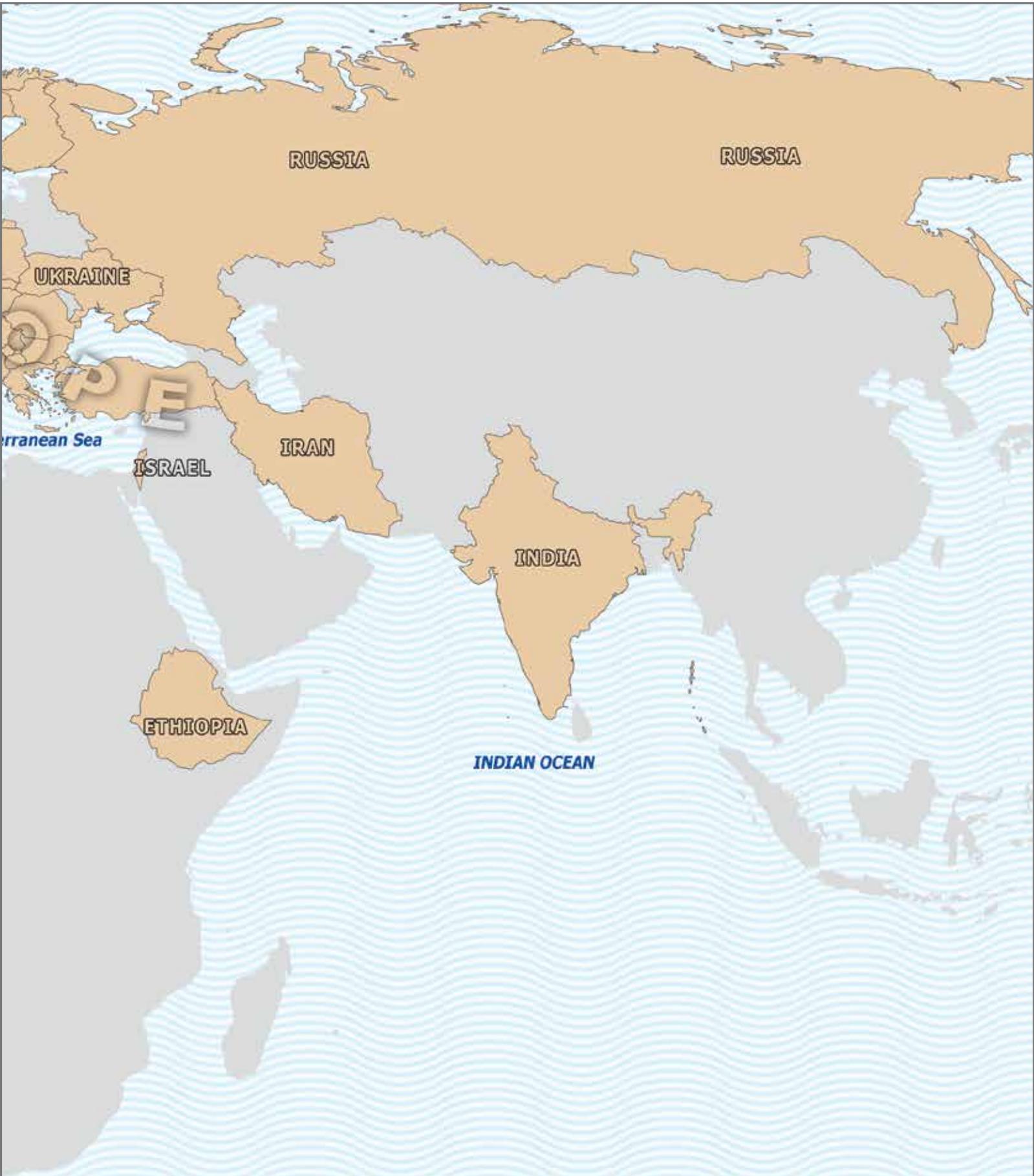
*Bring my sons from afar  
and my daughters from the ends of the earth.”*  
— ISAIAH 43:5–6

*“I will bring them out from the nations and gather them  
from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land.”*  
— EZEKIEL 34:13

**NOTE TO TEACHER:** Visit [www.ifcj.ca/keystoIsrael](http://www.ifcj.ca/keystoIsrael) to download some photos of families arriving in Israel to share with your class. Have a map of the world handy to show your students where these families are coming from — Ethiopia, France, Venezuela, Ukraine, Russia, India.

**NOTE TO TEACHER:** If you have older students, have volunteers look up the Bible verses and read them aloud to the class. Read as many of these verses as time permits.





## Telling the Story

### Introduce the story by saying to the children:

The Bible clearly tells us that God ALWAYS intended for His people to come back to Israel and live in the land that He had promised to Abraham. Our Bible story today is about the very first group of Jews who returned to their homeland after they had been conquered and driven out from their country by a nation called Babylon.

### VIDEO

#### Introduce the video and today's Key to I.S.R.A.E.L. — *Aliyah*:

Let's begin with a short video introducing our Key to I.S.R.A.E.L. for today and our Bible story, what the people did when they returned, and how Christians like us can help bring Jews home to Israel today!

#### Show the video:



## BIBLE STORY (EZRA 1:1–11; 2:1–6:22) — GOD'S PEOPLE RETURN

### Introduce the Bible story by saying:

Our story comes from the book of Ezra and takes place about 70 years after the armies of Babylon swept through Jerusalem, destroying the city, the city walls, and sadly for the Jewish people, the Holy Temple itself. The Babylonians took as captives all the Jews who were still living in Jerusalem and forced them to leave their homeland and live in Babylon.

**A**s our story begins, the old king of Babylon had died, and the new king was not very powerful. So a new group of people, known as the Persians, conquered the Babylonians and were now in control under King Cyrus of Persia.

In the very first chapter of Ezra, we discover that God moved the heart of King Cyrus to issue a proclamation throughout his kingdom that said:

*“The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them.”* (Ezra 1:2-3)

King Cyrus also commanded his people to help the Jewish survivors return to their homeland by providing them with silver, gold, goods, livestock, and offerings for the Temple.

### Help the children understand the story by saying:

Can you imagine how happy the Jewish people were when they heard this? Not only were they allowed to go back home again, but the king also gave them permission to rebuild God’s Holy Temple in Jerusalem so that they could worship Him once again.

And all this was done so that God’s promise to His people would be fulfilled! What an amazing story!

Not only that, King Cyrus returned all the items from the first Holy Temple that had been taken by the King of Babylon. In all, 5,400 gold and silver items were returned to the Israelites for the Temple. And in total, 50,000 people made the difficult and dangerous journey back to Jerusalem.

One of the very first things that the people did after they had settled themselves into their homes was to rebuild the altar that had stood outside the Temple itself. More than anything, the people wanted to worship God and to show their love for Him. They did this even before they had laid down the foundation

for the Temple. Under the leadership of a man named Zerubbabel, the people began collecting the materials they would need to rebuild God’s Temple.

It took them two years to hire the workers they needed, to gather all the materials, and to start building. As soon as they began the project, trouble started. Israel’s enemies were not pleased at all when they heard that the people had returned to their homeland and had started to rebuild the Temple.

These men tried all sorts of ways to disrupt and discourage the people from finishing the job. They even appealed to a new king of Persia, King Xerxes, who had replaced Cyrus and told him that the people were a bunch of troublemakers. Because the king didn’t know about Cyrus’ proclamation, he ordered the work to stop.

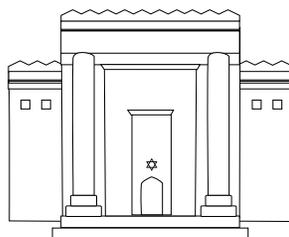
It wasn’t until nearly ten years later that a new king came into power, King Darius. The Israelites requested that Darius look for the proclamation that Cyrus had issued giving them permission to rebuild the Temple. Sure enough, the decree was found, and King Darius gave the following order:

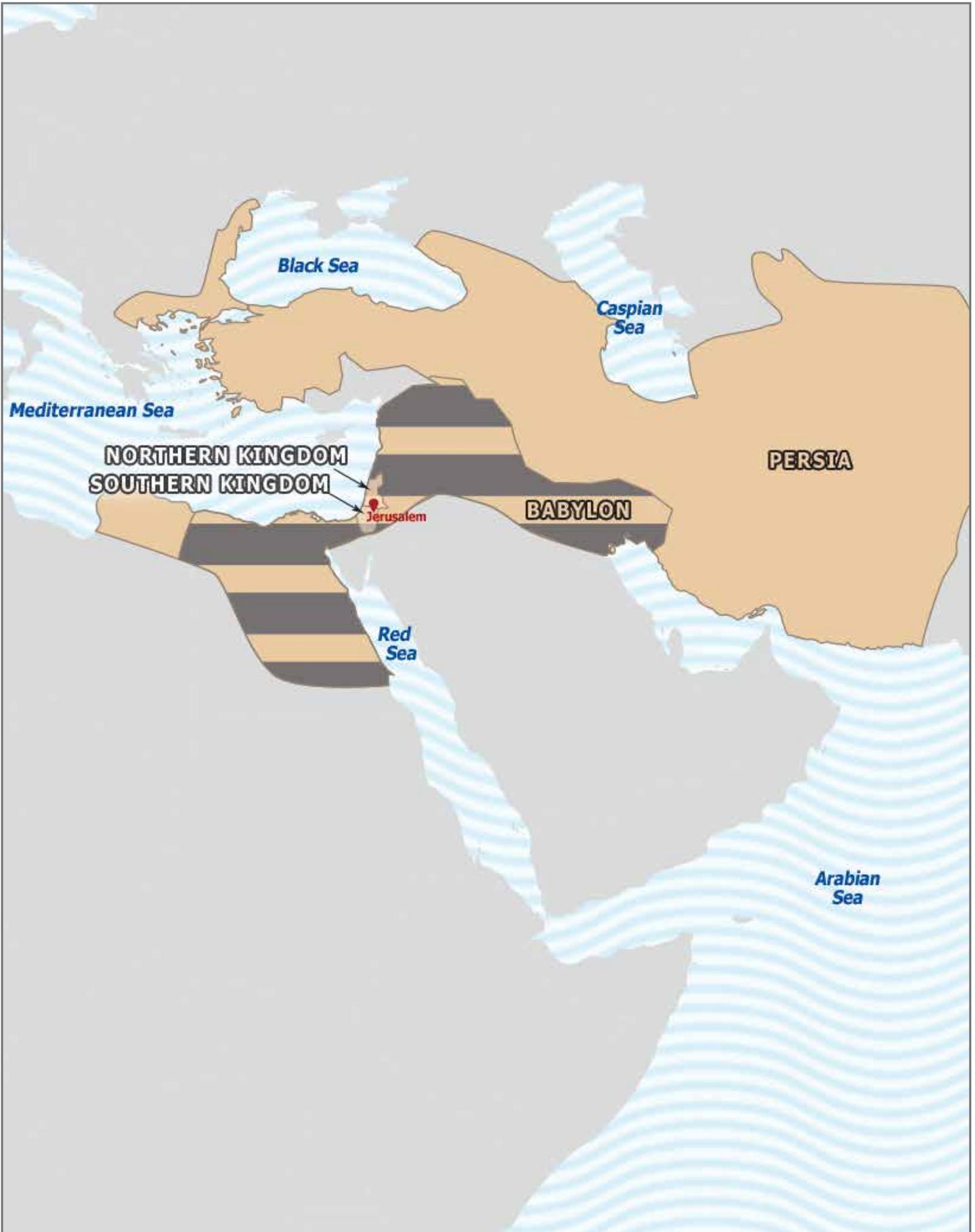
*Do not interfere with the work on this temple of God. Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its site . . . May God, who has caused his Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem. (EZRA 6:7, 12)*

And like King Cyrus did many years before, King Darius also commanded the Persians to help the Jews rebuild the Temple:

*Whatever is needed—young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and olive oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem—must be given them daily without fail . . . (EZRA 6:9)*

Finally, the Jewish people were able to finish rebuilding the Temple of God! There was a great celebration, as all the people who had returned gathered in Jerusalem to dedicate the house of God. The people were filled with joy because God had changed the mind of the king so that “*he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel*” (EZRA 6:22).





## Today's Story

### Introduce the story by saying:

Today's story is based on information about the Ethiopian Jewish community that has returned to Israel over the last few decades and the true story of one family that was brought to Israel by *The Fellowship's* "On Wings of Eagles" program in 2013.

Thousands of years ago a group of Jews ended up in Ethiopia. Many believe that their ancestors were from the Tribe of Dan, one of the original 12 tribes of Israel who had been exiled when the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel. This group observed traditional Jewish customs and biblical laws for thousands of years. In fact, before the internet or even television, most of these Jews thought that they were the only Jews in the whole world! Over the centuries, this community of faithful Jews had one goal: To one day return to Jerusalem.

The Jews of Ethiopia even had a song about it. They knew that certain birds, the storks, passed through Ethiopia every year as they migrated to Israel. As the song tells, the Jews would look up to the storks in the sky and ask them to inquire about Jerusalem. They wanted to know what was going on in Jerusalem, if Jerusalem even remembered them, and that they hoped to go there one day, too.

Some children also turned this into a game. One little girl named Aja, who grew up in a small farming town in Ethiopia, used to pretend that she was a bird. She and her friends would spread out their arms like wings and pretend to fly. The girls giggled with delight as they pretended to fly high in the sky. As they "flew," they would imagine that they were flying home to Jerusalem.

It was a fun game to play, but as Aja grew older, she knew that flying to Jerusalem was only a dream – a dream shared by her parents and their parents and even their parents, too. But they never actually flew to Jerusalem. It was only a fairy tale that would never come true.

Or so she thought.

One day, when Aja was grown up and married she heard that Jewish Ethiopians actually were flying to Jerusalem! They weren't flying like birds as Aja had pretended as a child, but on magnificent machines that Aja had never seen or heard about before. These giant machines with wings of their own were called

### NOTE TO TEACHER:

*For younger children, allow them a few minutes to play their own version of this game. Ask them to fly like a bird, imagining that they are flying over Jerusalem. What do they see?*

airplanes, and they could fly in the sky – just like the birds. And they were bringing Jewish people just like Aja home to Jerusalem!

Aja and her husband couldn't believe it. Their dream of flying to Jerusalem might actually come true! They waited many years for their turn, but the day finally arrived when Aja, her husband, and their three small children, boarded an airplane to Israel. They were so happy – they almost couldn't believe their dream was finally coming true!

When the family arrived in Israel, they were given a place to stay in the hills surrounding Jerusalem. When Aja looked out of her window, she could actually see Jerusalem! As she watched the birds in the sky, Aja remembered the game she had played as a child. It wasn't a fairy tale after all.

Aja and the Jewish people had come home.

### **NOTE TO TEACHER:**

*You can find a wonderful video about the Tribe of Dan coming home to Israel at [www.ifcj.ca/keystoIsrael](http://www.ifcj.ca/keystoIsrael). If you have time, share the video with your class so they can see who the Ethiopian Jews are and how excited they are to return to Israel.*



## Talk about it!

**Use the following questions and discussion to help children understand how God is keeping His promise to the Jewish people to bring them back home, and how we as Christians can help!** Use as many of the questions below as you like to discuss the main points of the lesson with the children. Your students may not know the answers to all the questions, but challenge them to think about possible responses before you share the answer. Choose questions that you think will enhance your discussion, and use others for background information if students have questions.

**Where do you think all the Jews went who had been exiled from Israel thousands of years ago?**

**When Joshua and the Jewish people conquered the land that God had promised to Abraham, there were 12 tribes of Israel,** named for the 12 sons of Jacob: Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Ephraim and Manasseh. They were united as the Kingdom of Israel until after King Solomon died. Then they were divided into two kingdoms, the Northern Kingdom called Israel that consisted of 10 tribes (Reuben, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Ephraim and Manasseh) and the Southern Kingdom of Judah which consisted of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah.

**Around 722 BCE, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians and exiled from their land.** They became known as “The Ten Lost Tribes” of Israel because no one was sure where they had gone. But do you know what? We are finding some of them today! For example, many believe the Ethiopian Jews are descendants of the tribe of Dan and the Jews from India are descendants of the tribe of Manasseh.

**Our story from the book of Ezra is about the Southern Kingdom, the tribes of Benjamin and Judah.** They were exiled from their land around 586 BCE by the Babylonians, who had conquered the Assyrians. This was considered the first exile from the land of Israel and the first time the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed.

Almost 800 years later in 70 CE, after the time that Jesus had lived, the Romans exiled the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, from Israel and destroyed the Second Temple that the people in our story today had rebuilt. The Temple has never been rebuilt in Jerusalem to this day.

The tribes of Judah and Benjamin were never lost. They spread out to all parts of the world— many to Europe, to Russia, and much later to America where many Jews still live today.

However, even though most Jews lived outside of Israel for thousands of years, there were always some Jews in Israel. And throughout the centuries, Jews in every generation have made *aliyah*, returning to their homeland, even though it was very, very hard to do.

**If you had been gone from your homeland for thousands and thousands of years, how would you feel? Do you think you would have given up hope of ever returning?**

**How is it possible that over thousands of years the Jewish people never forgot their dream of returning to Jerusalem?**

**Many people who lived before the state of Israel was reborn believed that God had broken His promise** with His people, the children of Israel. They believed that they would never return. After all, it had been thousands of years since they were thrown out of their land!

**But many others never stopped believing** that God would keep His promise and return His chosen people to their land one day, no matter how long that might take. Today, the State of Israel is proof that God kept His promise! The Jewish people have returned to their land!

**The Jewish rabbis worried about this, too.**

In fact, they were so concerned that the Jews might forget Jerusalem, they established many customs, like

- Saying the verse from Psalm 137, *“If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill”* (v. 5) during celebrations such as weddings.
- Psalm 137 is also said as part of the “Grace after Meals.”
- Jewish prayers, said three times a day, include many pleas to return to Jerusalem.
- Jewish homes were required to have an unfinished part or some other reminder, such as a missing brick in the wall, of Jerusalem.

These, among other customs, helped the Jews remember their true identity and homeland.

### **NOTE TO TEACHER:**

*For older students, have them look up and read aloud Psalm 137.*

*Ask them how the verses in this psalm connect to both our Bible Story and Today's Story.*

**Think about our Bible story and the story about Aja and her family returning to Israel. How did God use other people to help them return to their homeland?**

**In the Bible story, God stirred the heart of King Cyrus to allow the surviving Jews to return to Israel and rebuild the Temple.**

Moreover, the king commanded that his people help the Jews by providing them with money and other resources to rebuild their homes and the Temple. Years later, after their enemies stopped their work on rebuilding the Temple, the Jews appealed to the new king, Darius, to find King Cyrus' decree. He did, and the work resumed. Again, King Darius ordered that the people help the Jews rebuild their Temple.

**Today, many Gentiles (non-Jewish people) are helping Jews return to Israel.** Many organizations, like *The Fellowship*, help Jews return to Israel by providing them with airplane tickets, money to start a new life in Israel, and other resources — all provided through the donations and help of Christians and others. This is in fulfillment of God's promised made to His people in the Bible. Let's read a few of those verses together:

*The LORD will have compassion on Jacob;  
once again he will choose Israel  
and will settle them in their own land.*

*Foreigners will join them  
and unite with the descendants of Jacob. — ISAIAH 14:1*

*This is what the Sovereign LORD says:*

*“See, I will beckon to the nations,  
I will lift up my banner to the peoples;  
they will bring your sons in their arms  
and carry your daughters on their hips.” — ISAIAH 49:22*

*See, I will bring them from the land of the north  
and gather them from the ends of the earth.*

*Among them will be the blind and the lame,  
expectant mothers and women in labour;  
a great throng will return. — JEREMIAH 31:8*

**If God is all-powerful and can do anything, why do we need to help bring His people home?**

**God doesn't need our help to bring His people to Israel, but He gives us the opportunity and privilege to be His partner.** In fact, God doesn't *need* our help with anything – not with charity, taking care of the needy, or helping an elderly person cross the street. But He wants us to work with Him and do this holy work. It turns us into better people and makes God proud of us.

## Apply It!

### Say to the children:

Who remembers our Key to I.S.R.A.E.L. for today?

### Allow for responses, then say,

That's right! **A** is for **Aliyah**. Do you remember what that word means?

### Allow for responses, then say,

**Right again. It means immigrating to Israel.** Today we learned that in the Bible God had promised His people thousands and thousands of years ago that He would bring them back to Israel. We also learned that the Jewish people are returning to their land today, fulfilling biblical prophecy, with the help of Christians like us!

**We've talked about the many things that people coming to a new country need.** Some may need to learn a new language. They will have to find a job, find new schools, and make a new home.

One way we can help newcomers to Israel — called *olim* (pronounced oh-LEEM) — is to let others know about their needs.

We are going to make a collage with images of all the things that *olim* might need to make a new home in Israel that you can share with your friends, your family, and your neighbours.

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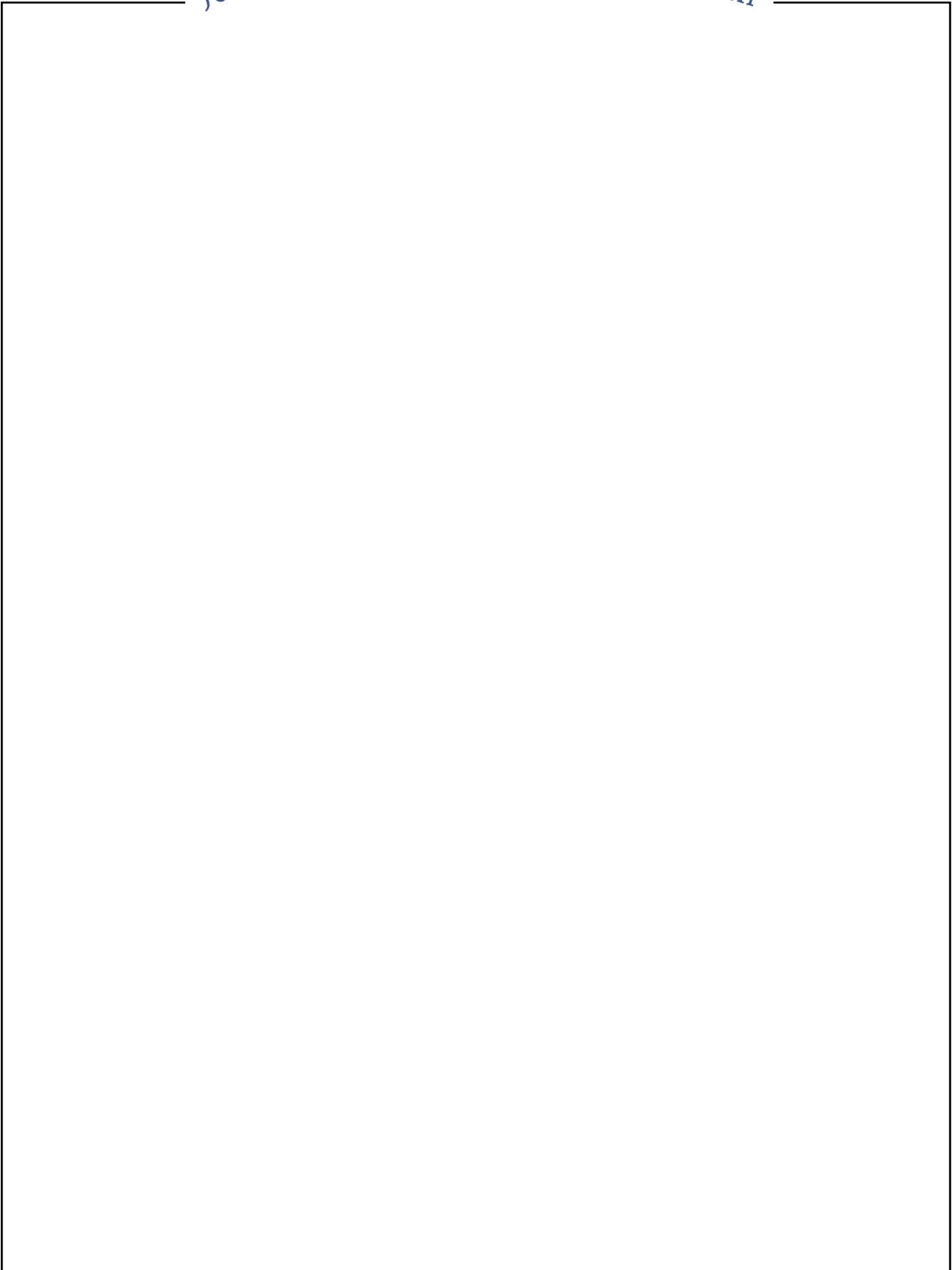
*Have a collection of old magazines so students can cut out and glue images to make their collage.*

### NOTE TO TEACHER:

*Older students may want to include a Bible verse at the bottom of the page with one of the verses from our lesson.*

**MAKE THE COLLAGE**

Jews making *Aliyah* need our help with



## Activity — *Aliyah* Mobile

### Prepare for the activity

For this project, you will need for each student:

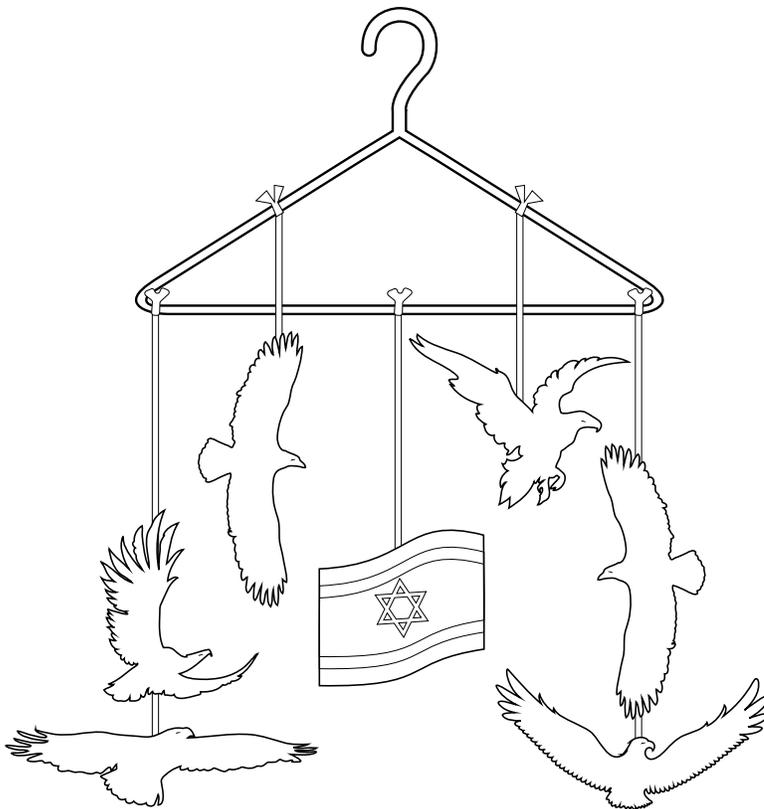
- A wire coat hanger
- Five pieces of ribbon cut into different lengths
- The activity sheet with six eagles and one Israeli flag printed on it
- Tape

### Introduce the activity

Each eagle represents a country from which Jews have been rescued and brought to Israel: Russia, Ethiopia, Ukraine, India, Yemen, and France.

### Have the children create the mobile:

1. Colour the eagles and Israeli flag.
2. Cut out the eagles and the flag along the blue lines.
3. Tie or tape the five pieces of ribbon to the coat hanger as shown.
4. Once that is complete, have the students tape the eagles to the ribbons as shown, placing the Israeli flag in the center.



### NOTE TO TEACHER:

*If you have time, you can add colour to the coat hanger by twisting ribbon around the wire.*

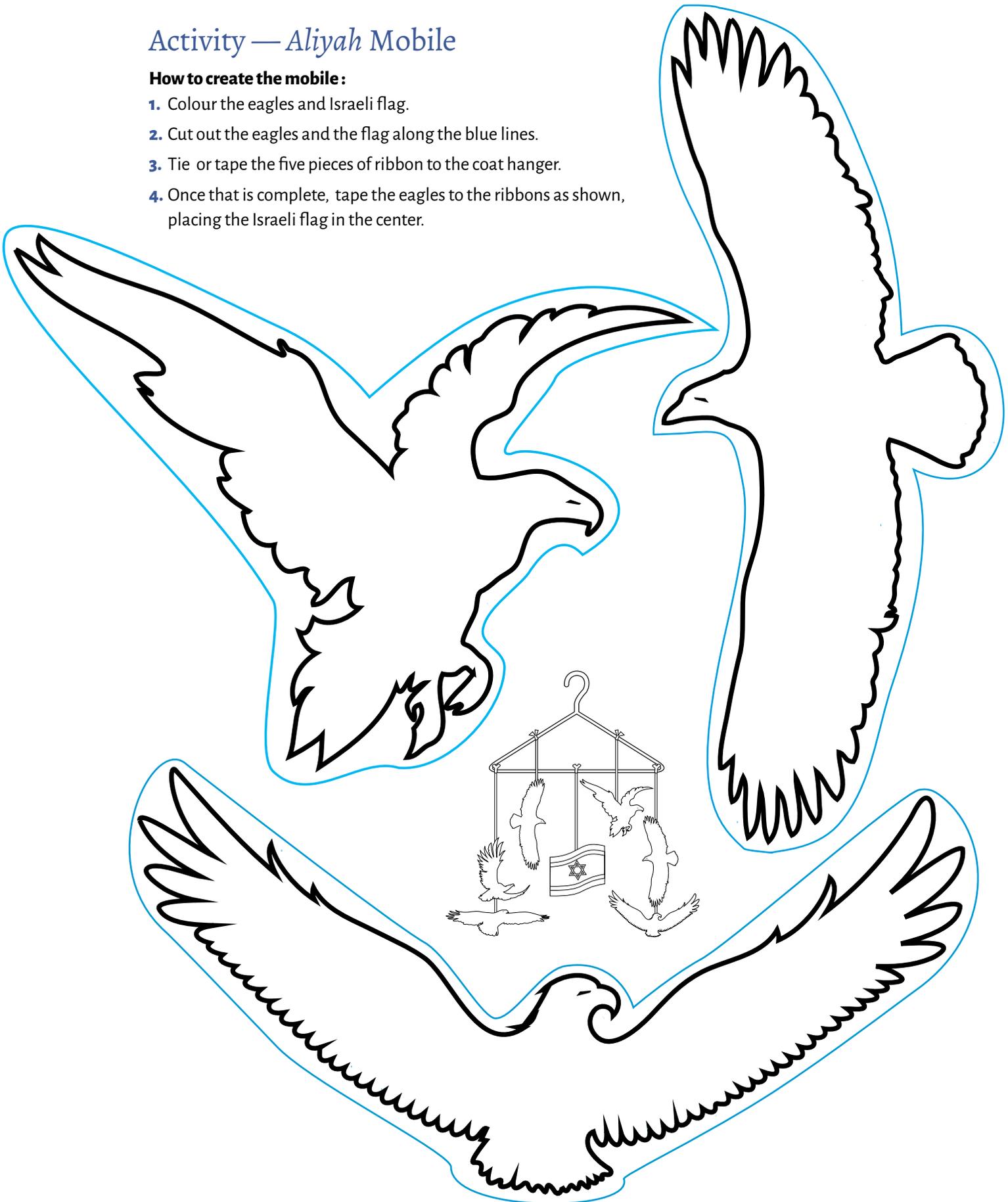
### NOTE TO TEACHER:

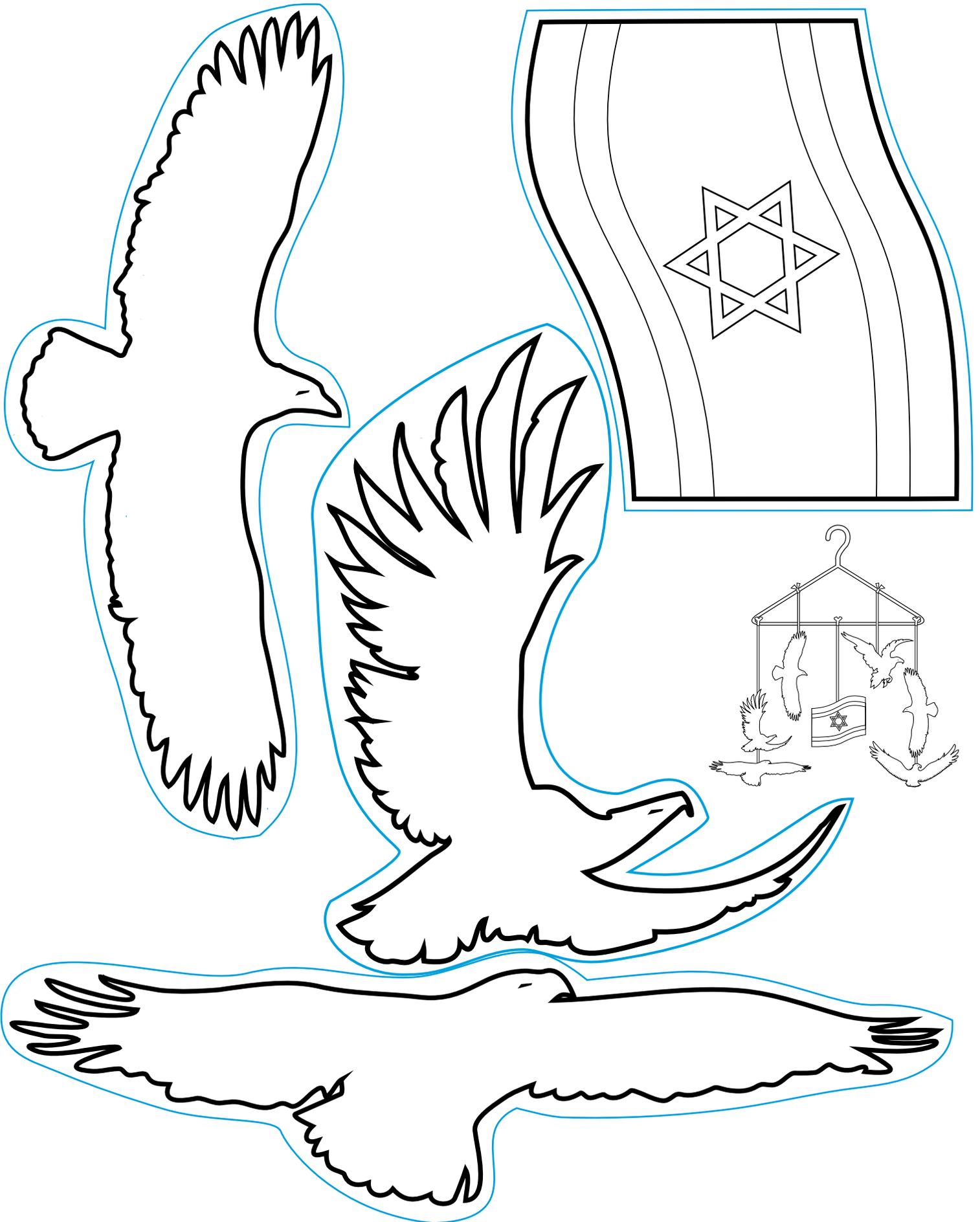
*To make this activity more challenging and interesting to older students, have them write key Bible verses about returning to Israel (Deuteronomy 30:4; Isaiah 43:5; Ezekiel 34:13), or short inspirational messages that would encourage children moving to Israel.*

## Activity — *Aliyah* Mobile

### How to create the mobile:

1. Colour the eagles and Israeli flag.
2. Cut out the eagles and the flag along the blue lines.
3. Tie or tape the five pieces of ribbon to the coat hanger.
4. Once that is complete, tape the eagles to the ribbons as shown, placing the Israeli flag in the center.





## Let's Learn Hebrew

Listen to our Hebrew words for this lesson at [www.ifcj.ca/keystoIsrael](http://www.ifcj.ca/keystoIsrael).

**Aliyah**  
עליה  
Immigrate to Israel

**Matos**  
מטוס  
Airplane

**Safah**  
שפה  
Language

**Tarbut**  
תרבות  
Culture

**Chadash**  
חדש  
New

**Olim**  
עולים  
Immigrants

# Your Key to I.S.R.A.E.L.

Make the key.

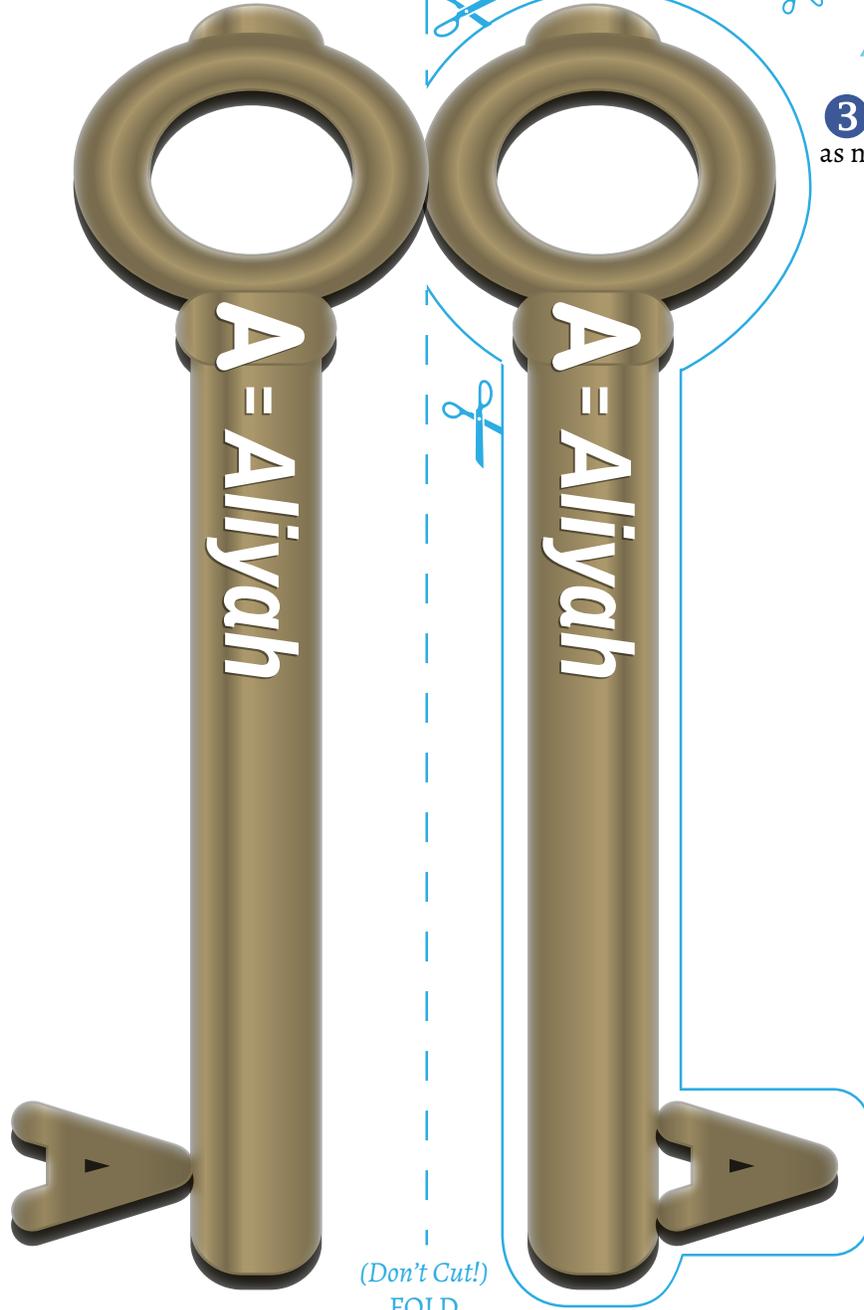
**1** Fold on dotted line  
*(keep it folded)*



**2** With paper folded, cut along solid line



**3** Tape as needed



*(Don't Cut!)  
FOLD  
HERE  
(Keep it  
folded)*

## Family Time

### ON GOD'S EAGLES

*“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.”*

— EXODUS 19:4

**Between June 1949 and September 1950, Israel ran a secret operation known as “Operation Magic Carpet.”**

Three hundred and eighty flights were made to Israel, rescuing over 49,000 Jews from Arab countries where they were oppressed.



**When the Jews being rescued**

**boarded the planes that would fly them to Israel, they were sure that the Messiah had come.**

Why? They had never seen airplanes before! They were sure that these huge mechanical birds were the “eagles” spoken of in the Bible by the prophet Isaiah: *“They will soar on wings like eagles”* (40:31). To these Jews, those airplanes were God’s eagles that would carry them home.

In time, Operation Magic Carpet became more popularly known as “Operation Wings of Eagles.”

**These Jews weren’t completely wrong.** Although the Messiah had not yet come, they were experiencing the miracles foretold by the prophets. The Jewish people were on their way home, and like eagles, they took flight.

**The children of Israel who left Egypt for Israel went on “eagles’ wings,” too.** In the book of Exodus, God says: *“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself”* (19:4). The children of Israel certainly didn’t fly on airplanes, so just what did God mean?

**The wise Jewish scholars who studied the Bible explained that passage in the following way:**

All birds carry their babies in their claws because they are afraid of high-flying predators that soar above them and could otherwise harm their babies. But no bird flies higher than the eagle. The eagle only has to worry about men below. So the eagle puts its babies on its wings. The eagle places itself between its children and any danger.

Just like an eagle, no one is higher than God. And like an eagle, He protects His children with love. When the Lord took the children of Israel out of Egypt, He placed the “pillar of cloud” between them and the Egyptians. The Egyptians would have to get through the cloud if they wanted to reach the Israelites. But God would not let them. He miraculously kept them safe from harm.

**Today, God still carries His children on “wings of eagles.”** This is true of the Jews God is bringing home to Israel today, and it is true for so many of us who simply benefit from God's love, help, and protection.

Whether we know it or not, God shields us from harm every single day. There are so many bad things that *could* happen to us, but *don't* because of God's protection. Whether we can feel His hand in our lives or not, God is carrying us to where we need to be through the people and experiences we encounter each day.

**Even if we aren't sure things in our life are going the right way, we can be sure that we are on “wings of eagles,”** and that God will bring us to the places, people, and opportunities that are meant for us. God can carry us through anything and we must trust Him with everything.

### FAMILY TALK

1. Just as airplanes were used – and are used – to help fulfill biblical prophecy by bringing God's people home, how else might you use modern technology to serve God's purposes? Discuss computers, the internet, cameras, phones, refrigerators, and anything else you can think of!
2. Together as a family, think of a time when God protected you from something bad happening. Talk about the different ways that God protects you each day.
3. How is God helping to protect His people today, who are living in lands where they are persecuted for being Jewish, or where they are living in great need? What are ways that your family can get involved?
4. *The Fellowship* has been able to bring nearly 750,000 Jews back to Israel over the past 25 years through its ministry program, *On Wings of Eagles*, with the help of Christian families just like yours. Learn more about this exciting program by watching this video together. You can view the video at [www.ifcj.ca/keystoIsrael](http://www.ifcj.ca/keystoIsrael). Then discuss ways you can get involved in helping a Jewish family return home to Israel.
5. Based on what you have learned about *aliyah* and God's promises to His people, what is one thing you can share with a friend about the importance of helping the Jewish people?