

LESSON 76

The Exiles Return

EZRA 1–3



BIBLE TRUTH

GOD MOVES IN THE HEARTS OF MEN TO REBUILD THE TEMPLE
AND ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSE

LESSON SNAPSHOT

1. **OPENING REVIEW** **5 MIN**
Use last week’s lesson outline to review with the children what they learned.
2. **BIBLE STORY** **10 MIN**
Read Ezra 1 from the Scriptures or read story 76, “The Exiles Return,” from *The Gospel Story Bible*.
3. **OBJECT LESSON 1** **15 MIN**
Upside-Down Cake
SUPPLIES:
 - ✓ double-layer chocolate cake with vanilla frosting
 - ✓ new plastic tablecloth
 - ✓ enough plates and forks for the class
4. **TEACHING/DISCUSSION** **10 MIN**
5. **OBJECT LESSON 2** **10 MIN**
A Famous Cymbal Player
SUPPLIES:
 - ✓ a set of cymbals or at least one cymbal with a drumstick
6. **SWORD BIBLE MEMORY** **5 MIN**
7. **ACTIVITY TIME** **10 MIN**
Coloring Activity
SUPPLIES:
 - ✓ coloring page 76—one copy for each child
8. **CLOSING PRAYER** **5 MIN**
9. **BONUS OBJECT LESSON** **10 MIN**
Three Cakes
SUPPLIES:
 - ✓ three cakes: (1) one cupcake, nicely decorated; (2) one medium-sized cake, nicely decorated with a drawing of Solomon’s temple on it; and (3) one beautifully decorated large cake with the cross of Jesus in the middle. *Note:* The last cake should be much more spectacular than the medium cake. (If you have a cake decorator in your church, she would probably have a lot of fun creating and decorating these cakes for your class.)
 - ✓ cake knife, plates, forks, and napkins

TOTAL 80 MIN

PREPARING TO TEACH

TEACHING POINTS

The exiles return after seventy years of captivity—Like Darius, Cyrus is a king of Babylon who is served by Daniel. After seventy years of captivity, God moves on the heart of this pagan king to return God’s people to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple there. This happens just as Jeremiah had prophesied (see Jeremiah 29). Eventually, more than forty-two thousand of God’s people return to their hometowns in Judah. Just as when Israel left Egypt, the people of Babylon give the Jews gold, silver, and valuable gifts as they prepare to leave.

The altar is rebuilt—After the exiles return from Babylon, they spend seven months settling back into their hometowns. Then they gather in Jerusalem and the first thing they do is to rebuild the altar of the Lord. They resume regular sacrifices and celebrate one of the feasts according to the law of Moses. They also give money to masons and carpenters, and they barter for trees from Lebanon for the rebuilding of the temple.

The rebuilding of the temple begins—In the second year after they return, the Israelites begin rebuilding the temple. A celebration takes place after the foundation is laid, with many people rejoicing because the temple is being rebuilt but others weeping because they believe the new temple will not be as beautiful as Solomon’s temple was. The most important thing about this day, however, is that God has returned his people to the Promised Land just as he promised.

WHERE IS JESUS? _____

How does today's Bible story fit into God's greater plan of redemption?

Read Ezra 3:8–13.

Some of the people of God who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon were very old. If a child had been a ten-year-old when first captured, he would be an eighty-year-old now after the seventy-year captivity in Babylon.

The older men remembered how beautiful Solomon's temple had been before being destroyed. That's why they were sad and crying. But their children, who had grown up in Babylon, had never seen Solomon's temple, so they rejoiced when the foundation was laid.

Even though the new temple was not as big and beautiful as the original, something very special would one day happen there. Jesus would visit this rebuilt temple; he would walk across the very foundation they were laying. The older men had good reason to be sad, but if they had only known that Jesus would teach and heal in the rebuilt temple, they would have rejoiced instead of crying.

Jesus is the new temple. When we become Christians we become a part of Christ's body, the church—we become a part of the new temple (1 Corinthians 3:16–17). God's new, most glorious temple is not man-made but God-made. The same presence of God that filled Solomon's temple fills the heart of every Christian.

THE LESSON

OPENING REVIEW

5 MIN

Use last week's lesson outline to review with the children what they learned.

BIBLE STORY

10 MIN

Read Ezra 1 from the Scriptures or read story 76, "The Exiles Return," from *The Gospel Story Bible*.

OBJECT LESSON 1 **15 MIN**

Upside-Down Cake

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ double-layer chocolate cake with vanilla frosting
- ✓ new plastic tablecloth
- ✓ enough plates and forks for the class

The object is to illustrate why the rebuilt temple would not have been as glorious as the former temple.

Make or purchase the cake and show the class just how nice the cake is. Stage an accident with another teacher where the cake slips out of your hand onto the table. The clumsy teacher should be very apologetic and try to straighten out the cake saying that it is a good thing it landed on the brand new tablecloth. He or she should try to smooth out the frosting saying it is okay. The first teacher should say that she was planning on giving it to the class but now she is not sure. There should be some moans from the class, but the majority of them will likely celebrate the fact it was able to be restored.

Tell them how that reminds you of today’s lesson. Pass out a piece of cake to each as you read through the story of the return of the exiles and explain how the former temple (like your original cake) was more glorious than the restored temple (like your cake after the fall).

Tell the class that ultimately the temple was designed to point to another temple—a heavenly temple.

Then ask the class the following questions:

What is the heavenly temple that the earthly temple was to point toward?

(The church, the body of Christ, is the heavenly temple to which the earthly temple points. All believers who are in Christ make up that living temple.)

Why was the altar of the temple started first?

(The altar was critical for the sacrifice of animals for the people to be obedient to God’s command, and the temple was where the presence of God dwelt with his people. The sooner they could build the temple, the sooner God would have a place to dwell. Remember, the God of Israel was the living God who made his dwelling among men.)

TEACHING/DISCUSSION

10 MIN

Using the teaching points, teach through the lesson for today.

OBJECT LESSON 2

10 MIN

A Famous Cymbal Player

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ a set of cymbals or at least one cymbal with a drumstick

Hit the cymbals and make a racket. Then when you get the class' attention ask them this question:

Who is the most famous cymbal player in the Bible?

(The answer is the prophet/priest/psalmist Asaph.)

Just who was Asaph?

(Asaph was a cymbal player appointed by David to play and then lead the temple musicians. The sons of Asaph carry on the tradition by playing after the seventy-year captivity. Some of the psalms are written by Asaph, like Psalms 73 through 83. Perhaps the words of Asaph in Psalm 73:25 best illustrate the passion of Asaph: "There is nothing on earth I desire besides you.")

WORD BIBLE MEMORY

5 MIN

Take time during the class to review the WORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.

ACTIVITY TIME

10 MIN

Coloring Activity

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ coloring page 76—one copy for each child

While the children are coloring, engage them by asking the following questions:

Why are the people celebrating?

(The people are celebrating because the temple foundation has been laid.)

Did everyone celebrate, or were some of the people sad?

(Some of the people were sad.)

Tell the children to draw a tear on one of the men's eyes. Tell the children that some people were sad because the new temple was not going to be as nice as the old one.

CLOSING PRAYER

5 MIN

Pick several children to pray prayers based on the day's scripture passages.

BONUS OBJECT LESSON 10 MIN

Three Cakes

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ three cakes: (1) one cupcake, nicely decorated; (2) one medium-sized cake, nicely decorated with a drawing of Solomon's temple on it; and (3) one beautifully decorated large cake with the cross of Jesus in the middle.
Note: The last cake should be much more spectacular than the medium cake. (If you have a cake decorator in your church, she would probably have a lot of fun creating and decorating these cakes for your class.)
- ✓ cake knife, plates, forks, and napkins

Hide the cakes in three separate places out of sight.

After telling the story, point out to the children that the older men remembered Solomon's temple so they were sad when the smaller, less impressive temple foundation was built. The younger men on the other hand, never saw Solomon's temple so they were excited and rejoiced at the laying of the foundation of the temple.

Take the five oldest children in your class and show them the medium cake without the rest of the class able to see what you are doing. (Rather than hide the cakes in your classroom you might have a helper bring them on cue one at a time to the hallway outside your room. That way you could take the five oldest children into the hallway to show them the cake.)

Once they see the cake, bring them back into the room. Then show the whole class the smallest cake. Those who did not see the larger cake will be impressed with the cupcake. Help the children see how the response of the older men was different than the younger men when the temple foundation was laid.

Transition to how Jesus fits into this lesson using the “Where Is Jesus?” portion of the lesson. Then to illustrate, show the class the largest cake. Put all three cakes together and talk about how Jesus is the greatest temple of all.

Share the cake with the class, or use this object lesson with a few classes and then invite everyone at the end to share the cake with you.

