

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** **10 MIN**
Connecting the Prophets
4. **TEACHING/DISCUSSION** **10 MIN**
5. **OBJECT LESSON 2** **20 MIN**
God’s Sovereignty in the People’s Return
SUPPLIES:
✓ pencils and paper
6. **SWORD BIBLE MEMORY** **5 MIN**
7. **ACTIVITY TIME** **15 MIN**
Rebuilding the Temple
SUPPLIES:
✓ colored pencils, crayons, and paper
8. **CLOSING PRAYER** **5 MIN**
9. **BONUS OBJECT LESSON** **10 MIN**
God Was Behind the King’s Decree
SUPPLIES:
✓ snacks (enough for everyone)
✓ paper bag
✓ water or some other drink (enough for everyone)
✓ paper cups and plates

TOTAL 90 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.

A LITTLE BIT MORE

Zerubbabel

Zerubbabel was in the line of David and a grandson of Jehoiachin. He was the one responsible for laying the foundation of the temple and completing it (Zechariah 4:9). He is mentioned in the genealogies of Matthew 1:12–13 and Luke 3:27. The temple he begins is often referred to as Zerubbabel's temple. The very one who lays the foundation for the temple is a forerunner of Christ.

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 10 MIN

Connecting the Prophets

Take time to connect the narrative in Ezra 3:1–13 with the companion description from Haggai 1:1–14.

Then ask the class the following questions:

- **What message did God send Haggai to deliver to Zerubbabel?**
(After rebuilding the altar and starting on the temple, the people got busy building their own houses and neglected the construction of the temple. The message to Zerubbabel was that Israel should not neglect the house of the Lord. He also tells Zerubbabel that the Lord is with him.)

- **What motivated the people to start work again on the temple?**
(The people feared the Lord and the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel [Haggai 1:14] in all the people to complete the work on the temple.)

God ensures that the work he wants to accomplish gets done. Here again we see the grace of God at work to accomplish his purpose. The Lord moves in the heart of the king to build him a house, and the Lord moves in the heart of the people to do the work of construction. God works similarly in our lives. Everything we accomplish is ultimately by his grace. God has a plan that points to the coming of Christ. Nothing will stand in the way of his plan being completed.)

TEACHING/DISCUSSION 10 MIN

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

OBJECT LESSON 2 20 MIN

God’s Sovereignty in the People’s Return

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ pencils and paper

Have the children read Ezra 1:1–11 and write a paragraph describing the sovereign involvement of God in the return to Jerusalem. Their paragraph should make the point that God moved both in the heart of the king and in the hearts of the people to rebuild a house for the Lord.

Ask the class the following questions:

■ Why is the desire of King Cyrus written in Ezra 1:2?

(King Cyrus, though a pagan king, seems to have heard clearly from the Lord. He reports that God “charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem.” What an amazing thing that God breaks into the life of a pagan king to do his will.)

Read Jeremiah 33:6–9. Ask the class how this prophecy was fulfilled in the decree of King Cyrus. (God’s judgment on Israel and Judah was temporary. At the completion of the seventy years of captivity, the Lord would forgive them and restore them to peace and prosperity. Cyrus’ determination to see Jerusalem resettled along with his releasing of the temple articles, the Hebrews, and the leaders enabled the prophecy to be fulfilled.)

SWORD BIBLE MEMORY 5 MIN

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

ACTIVITY TIME 15 MIN

Rebuilding the Temple

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ colored pencils, crayons, and paper

Have the children draw a picture of the Israelites all celebrating the completion of the foundation of the temple.

CLOSING PRAYER 5 MIN

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

BONUS OBJECT LESSON 10 MIN

God Was Behind the King’s Decree

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ snacks (enough for everyone)
- ✓ paper bag

- ✓ water or some other drink (enough for everyone)
- ✓ paper cups and plates

Keep the snacks hidden in a bag. After reading the Bible story, choose a student to go to the bag, pull out the snacks, and announce to the class that everyone is going to get a special snack today. Then have the student divide the snack among the plates and distribute them to the class. Repeat this for the drink.

Then ask the children the following questions:

- Who announced the snack? (the volunteer)
- Who portioned out the snack? (the volunteer)
- Who handed out the snack? (the volunteer)
- Who provided the snack? (the teacher)

Read Ezra 1:1–7 and ask the following questions:

- Who announced that the exiles could return? (King Cyrus)
- Who returned the vessels for the house of the Lord to the people? (King Cyrus)
- Who let the people return to Jerusalem? (King Cyrus)
- Who stirred the heart of the king to let them go? (God)

Help the class to see God's role. Just as there would not be a snack in your class today if you as the teacher did not provide it, so the Jews would never have returned if God had not moved in the heart of the king.