

THE EXILES RETURN

*God moved in the hearts of men to rebuild the temple
and accomplish His purpose.*



THE STORY: EZRA 1

MONDAY

God stirred the heart of King Cyrus

God stirred the heart of King Cyrus – Jeremiah prophesied that the captivity into Babylon would last seventy years (Jeremiah 25:8-12) and that God would bring His people back to Jerusalem after that time (Jeremiah 29:10). Ezra 1:1 opens with an amazing declaration: “In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia.”

God stirred the heart of the king to build him a house in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2). God also stirred in the hearts of the people a desire to return. Cyrus returned the gold and silver vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had taken away from the temple (Ezra 1:7-10). Nearly 50,000 people returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:64-65).

TALK ABOUT IT:

Who took the initiative to rebuild Jerusalem? *(God took the initiative. It was God who placed it on the heart of the king to rebuild the temple.)*

What did God do in the hearts of His people? *(God stirred their hearts to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the house of the Lord.)*

PRAY:

Ask God to stir your heart to be obedient to His Word so that you might accomplish great things for God. Remember, the same God who caused the hearts of the Jews to rebuild the temple can work in our hearts today!





The Altar is rebuilt

The altar is rebuilt – The exiles returned from Babylon and began the work of rebuilding. They settled in towns and then all came out to Jerusalem in the seventh month. The people rebuilt the altar of the Lord and began offering sacrifices to God night and day. They also gave money to masons and carpenters and traded for trees from Lebanon for the rebuilding of the temple.

TALK ABOUT IT:

Why did the people start offering sacrifices up to God? *(They were afraid of the people in the surrounding land (Ezra 3:3). They didn't want God to judge them and so they offered sacrifices to atone for their sins and to honor the Lord.)*

Why were these sacrifices important? *(The wages of sin is death. All Old Testament sacrifices point to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross.)*

PRAY:

Thank God that we no longer need to make daily sacrifices for our sins. Jesus paid the price for our redemption once and for all!





Where is Jesus?

After the foundation of the new temple had been started, the older men who had seen Solomon's glorious temple began to weep. (Ezra 3:12-13). In Haggai 2:2-9, God spoke to Israel regarding their sadness over how the new temple didn't measure up to the more beautiful one Solomon built. Haggai encouraged Zerubbabel by telling him that God's Spirit remained with His people. One day God will shake the heavens and the earth and then the glory of the house of God will be greater than even Solomon's temple.

Would the Temple of God be destroyed and rebuilt again? The increase of glory after the shaking refers to the final shaking of God's judgment (Hebrews 12:27-28). The greater glory of the house of God referred to another temple. Zerubbabel died before the temple that Haggai prophesied about came. Jesus said to a group of Jews, "Destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in three days" (John 2:18-25). He was speaking of his body. Now we all form the Temple of God in Christ because the Spirit of God dwells in us.

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

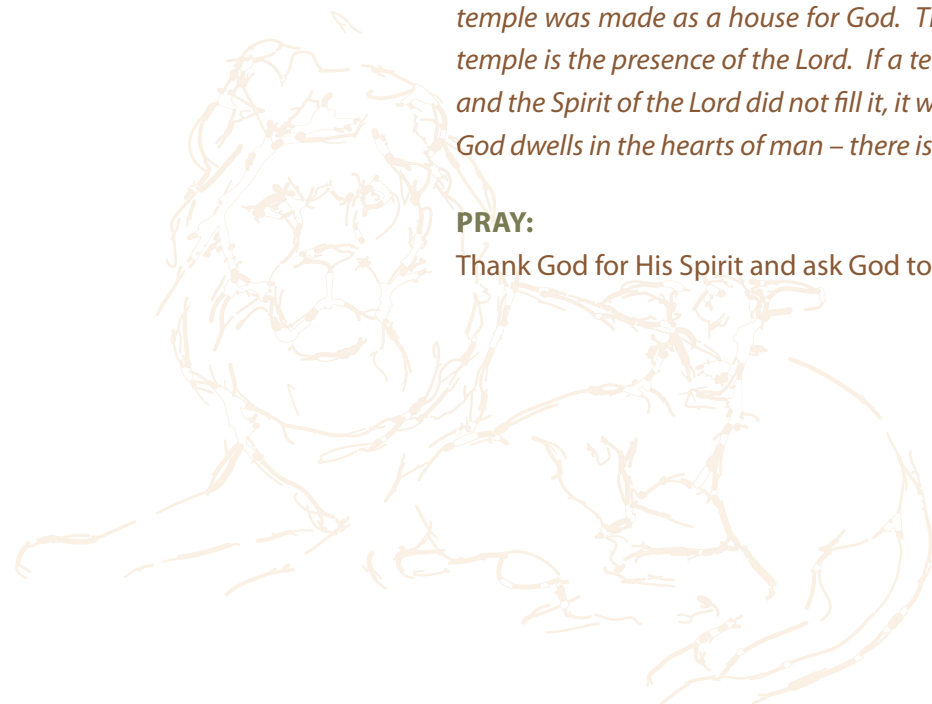
TALK ABOUT IT:

What was the most encouraging thing the prophet Haggai said to the people? (*"My Spirit remains with you." Haggai 2:5*)

Why was the presence of God more important than the size of the temple? (*The temple was made as a house for God. Therefore, the most important thing about the temple is the presence of the Lord. If a temple twice as glorious as Solomon's was built and the Spirit of the Lord did not fill it, it would be nothing. Remember, now the Spirit of God dwells in the hearts of man – there is no longer a need for a temple building.*)

PRAY:

Thank God for His Spirit and ask God to pour out His Spirit upon your family.





The rebuilding of the Temple begins

The rebuilding of the temple begins – In the second year after they returned, the temple rebuilding commenced. A celebration began after the foundation was laid. The sons of Asaph (Levites) took up their instruments to praise the Lord just like their father did in the earlier days of David. The younger generation shouted for joy at the completion of the temple. But the older priests and Levites and heads of households were sad. They had seen the former temple in all its splendor and they realized this temple would not compare. Still, just as God had promised in Deuteronomy 30:1-5, He brought them back to the land He promised.

TALK ABOUT IT:

Why did some men rejoice while others were sad? *(The younger men who only knew exile in Babylon were excited about the restoration of a temple for the Lord. But the men who had seen the old one realized the new one would never compare. They were looking at the outside appearance instead of what was important.)*

Why was this celebration amazing? *(Even though the Israelites had been in captivity for 70 years, they preserved the traditions of worship. The Levites took up their places in the correct dress and took up their instruments. The sons of Asaph – the great musician and psalm writer -- were able to play!)*

How did God make sure the Jews were kept safe while in captivity? *(God worked on the hearts of the Kings like Nebuchadnezzar and Darius through the life of Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to protect his people.)*

PRAY:

Thank God for the wonderful way he works all things together to preserve His people in spite of great adversity.





On the road to Emmaus.

This expression of a “sun of righteousness” is unique to Malachi. However, it parallels expressions of a Davidic King who would rule in righteousness from Isaiah (Isaiah 32:1) and a righteous branch described by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 23:5-6). We know from Romans 3:10 that there is no one righteous, not even one. Consequently, this passage must refer to Jesus, the only righteous one. The picture of calves being released from captivity speaks of our being set free from the bondage of sin.

TALK ABOUT IT:

What do “calves being released from their stalls” make you think about? *(The picture of calves being released from captivity speaks of our being set free from the bondage of sin.)*

What happens when the sun rises in the morning? How is that like the coming of Jesus? *(The rays of the sun reach out and bring light to the world. Jesus said in John 8:12 that “I am the light of the world.” Just like the sun, Jesus reached out to bring us truth and life.)*

PRAY:

Invite the light of Christ’s righteousness to shine down upon our sinful hearts and cleanse us from our sin.

