

THE EXILES RETURN

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: EZRA 3:1-13



God rebuilt the temple through men He called by grace.

The STORY

Pray with children to start class.

Teaching Points for Class Discussion:

The Exiles returned after 70 years of captivity – Jeremiah prophesied that the captivity into Babylon would last 70 years, see 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, see 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, see Ezra 1:7-10. Nearly 50,000 people returned to Jerusalem, Ezra 2:64-65. These people settled in towns and then came out to Jerusalem all together in the seventh month to offer sacrifices to the Lord.

The Altar is rebuilt – The people rebuilt the Altar of the Lord and began offering sacrifices to God both night and day. They also gave money to masons and carpenters and traded for trees from Lebanon for the rebuilding of the temple.

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, the Levites, took up their instruments to praise the Lord as did their father in the day 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.

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Where is Jesus?

Please use the following comments connecting today's lesson to the Gospel to help inform your understanding and serve you by aiding your preparation for class. Remember, we want to do more than present disconnected Bible stories and lessons to our young children. We want them to understand how each story in the Bible plays a part in God's greater plan of redemption.

In Haggai 2:2-9, God speaks to Israel regarding their sadness over the new temple and how it doesn't measure up to that of Solomon. Haggai encouraged Zerubbabel telling him that God's Spirit remains 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? This shaking referred to another temple. Zerubbabel would die before the temple the Haggai prophesied about would come. Jesus said to a group of Jews, "Destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in three days" (John 2:18-25).

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, see 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 hearts of every Christian.



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ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Read the following Bible passage from the Old Testament. Use the following questions to help the children understand how this passage points to Christ in the New Testament.

Bible Passage: Malachi 4:2

Connecting the passage to Christ:

This expression of a son of righteousness is unique to Malachi but parallels expressions of a Davidic King who will rule in righteousness from Isaiah (Isaiah 32:1) and a righteous branch described by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 23:5-6). Since we know from Romans 3:10 that there is no one righteous, not even one, then this passage must refer to Jesus, the only righteous one.

Questions for reflection:

- Why couldn't Malachi's description of a righteous son describe just any man? (Roman's 3:10 tells us that no man is righteous, not even one. The only man who was righteous was Jesus.)
- What other similar expressions describing Jesus as righteous do we find in the prophets? (Jesus is referred to as the righteous branch by Jeremiah 23:5-6 and a king who will rule in righteousness by Isaiah 11:1-4.)

SWORD BIBLE MEMORY

BE A DOER OF THE WORD

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.



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ACTIVITIES & OBJECT LESSONS

Use the following activities for practical application and discovery of this lesson. For the younger children, review the preschool questions and use them to help the children relate to the passage. For older children, ask them why they think this passage is in the Bible for us today. How is it supposed to affect our lives?

UPSIDE DOWN CAKE

Supplies

- double layered 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.

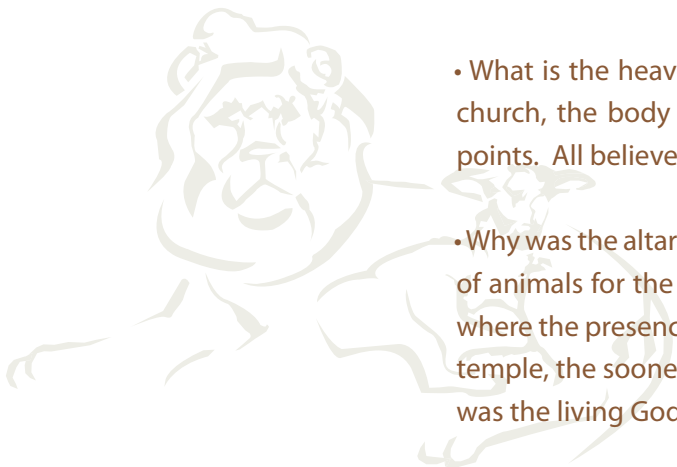
Make or purchase the cake and show the class just how nice the cake is. Stage an accident with another teacher where the cake slips out of your hand onto the table. The clumsy teacher should be very apologetic and try to straighten out the cake saying that it is a good thing it landed on the brand new tablecloth. He or she should try to smooth out the frosting saying it is ok. 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.)



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CONNECTING THE PROPHETS

Take time to connect the narrative story in Ezra 3:1-13 with the companion description from Haggai 1:1-12.

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 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 on the heart of the king to build him a house and the Lord moves on 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 which points to the coming of Christ. Nothing will stand in the way of His plan being completed.)

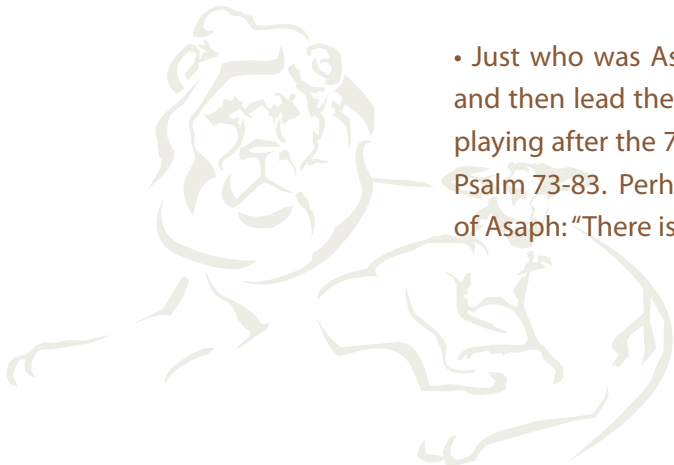
A FAMOUS CYMBAL PLAYER

Supplies:

a set of cymbals or at least
one cymbal with a drum
stick

Hit the cymbals and make a lot of 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 70 years captivity. Some of the psalms are written by Asaph, like Psalm 73-83. Perhaps the words of Asaph in Psalm 73:25 best illustrate the passion of Asaph: "There is nothing on earth I desire besides you.")



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PRAYER

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

IN CLASS PROJECT

The first and second grade children can use the preschool coloring sheet and questions. Have the older children draw a picture of the Israelites all celebrating the completion of the foundation of the temple.

FOR OLDER GRADES

Supplies:

pencil and worksheet
provided

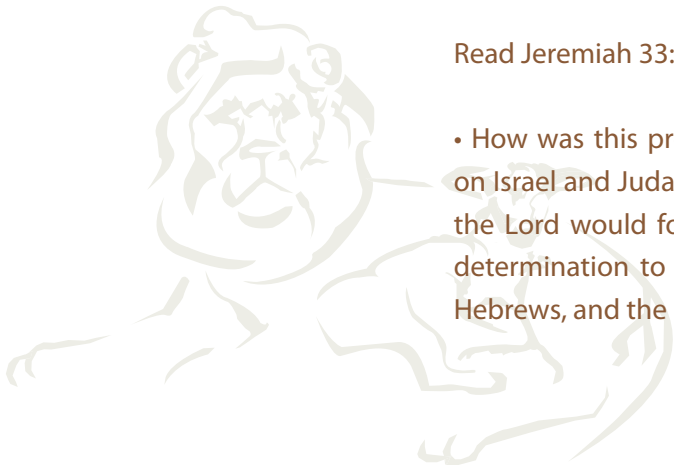
Have the children read Ezra 1:1-11 and write a paragraph describing the sovereign involvement of God in the return to Jerusalem. Their paragraph should make the point that God moved both on the heart of the king and on the hearts of the people to rebuild a house for the Lord.

Ask the class the following questions:

- Why is the desire of King Cyrus written in Ezra 1:2? (King Cyrus, though he is a pagan king, seems to have heard clearly from the Lord. He reports that "He 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 the will of God.)

Read Jeremiah 33:6-9.

- How was this prophecy fulfilled in the decree of King Cyrus? (God's judgment on Israel and Judah was temporary. At the completion of the 70 years of captivity the Lord would forgive them and restore them to peace and prosperity. Cyrus' determination to see Jerusalem resettled and releasing the temple articles, the Hebrews, and the leaders enabled the prophecy to be fulfilled.)



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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, see Zechariah 4:9. He is mentioned in the genealogies of Luke 3:27 and Matthew 1:12-13. 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.



