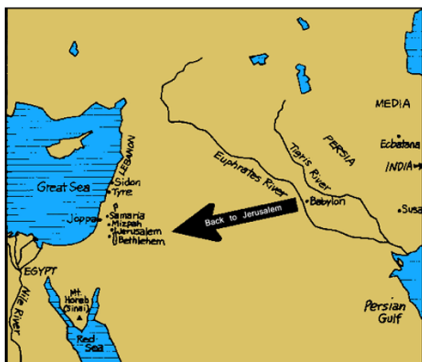


Return to Jerusalem- Temple and Law

Scripture Reference: [Ezra 1-10](#)



Suggested Emphasis: The Lord keeps His promises to us.

Memory Verse: The Lord will keep his promises. With love he takes care of all he has made. [Psalm 145:13b, ICB](#)



Story Overview:

The Lord had promised that the people would someday return to their land. After 70 years in exile, many of the Jewish people finally returned. Zerubbabel led one group back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Ezra led another group back to teach the people and restore God's Law.

Background Study:

Our story today is in two parts. The first part - Zerubbabel rebuilding the temple - is recorded in Ezra 1-6. It occurs around 520-516 BC in the time before Queen Esther. The second part - Ezra restores the Law - occurs after the story of Esther. It is recorded in Ezra 7-10. The story of Esther occurred sometime during the 80 years between chapters 6 and 7.

PART ONE: Cyrus (1:1) was the founder of the Persian Empire. After conquering Babylon, he freed the Jews to return to their land. Some returned immediately (Zerubbabel's group in about 538 BC) while others returned

later. Still others, like Daniel, remained in Babylon for the rest of their lives. Seventy years passed between the time the temple was destroyed and Zerubbabel's return. This was just as Jeremiah had prophesied (Jeremiah 25:8-11).

Under Zerubbabel, the Jews settled back into their homeland and then set out to rebuild the temple. At first, they offered sacrifices to the Lord on an open altar in the place where the temple had been. Two years after they had returned, the Levites (the priestly tribe of Israel) began to lay the foundation for the new temple. There was great celebration among the younger people when the foundation was laid. Yet, the older priests and leaders who had been alive when the old temple still stood could only weep. This temple was nothing compared to the grandeur of Solomon's temple.

There were many enemies of the Jews. During the seventy years that they were in Babylonian captivity, there was plenty of time for others to move into their territory. All of these nations were under the power of Persia but they still squabbled among themselves. These neighbouring nations kept causing problems for the Jews and work on the temple came to a standstill. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the Jews during this time. They encouraged the Jews to continue their work on the temple and not give up.

Leaders from the neighbouring nations sent a report back to King Darius hoping that the king would stop the work. Remember that Darius was the king of the province of Babylonia. He served under Cyrus, the King. Darius looked back in the records to make sure and then sent a letter back to the neighbouring nations and confirmed that Cyrus had indeed commissioned the Jews to return to their land and rebuild the temple. The letter told the neighbouring nations not only to stay away from the Jews and quit bothering them, but also to give them gifts and money from their treasuries.

Finally, the temple was completed and dedicated in 516 B.C. The people were able to celebrate Passover in their homeland (Ezra 6:13-22).

Ezra was a well-respected teacher of the Law. It is a real demonstration of God's power that Ezra was commissioned to go to Jerusalem to teach and help re-establish God's laws. All of his expenses were paid and priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and temple servants accompanied him. Ezra had acquired the art of writing, and so was known as a "ready scribe" of God's law (Ezra 7:6, 11, 21). He was also a devout and consecrated priest. Even though he had been born in Babylonia, he wanted to serve in the Lord's temple in Jerusalem.

Some Jews went with Ezra. The others were encouraged to give offerings to help those who went. Those who did not wish to go were encouraged to give an offering to help the ones who went. The king made available 100 talents of silver from his own treasury. He also provided 100 measures of wheat and about 100 baths of wine. With the offering money he told Ezra to buy animals for sacrifice to God. The king commanded that special containers be taken to use in the temple worship at Jerusalem (Ezra 7:19; 8:25). He also made it unlawful to require taxes from the Jewish priesthood who served in the Jerusalem temple (Ezra 7:24). Then the king specifically instructed Ezra to teach the people the laws of Ezra's God in their land.

Ezra saw the hand of God in all this as well as the blessing only He could give. Ezra offered a prayer of thanksgiving.

Ezra's goal was to take God's Word to the people of Israel. When he arrived he began a careful clean up of the sin that had invaded the lives of the Jews. One major event was separating the Jews from the foreign women they had married.



Way to Introduce the Story:

Before class wrap some yummy snacks in a colourful package. Bring a stopwatch or a timepiece with a second hand to class. Tell the children that you promise to let them open it in seventy seconds. As they wait, talk about the fact that God promised the Jews that they would have to wait seventy years before they were allowed to go back to their own land. "Do you think God kept his promise? Yes, God kept his promise! God always keeps his promises!" A countdown for the last ten seconds would make this activity even more fun.

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The Story:

For seventy years the Jews had been away from their home. They had to live in a country that was not their own. First, the country was called Babylon. Now it had a new king - King Cyrus. Now the country was called Persia.

The old people remembered the beautiful temple of God that used to be in Jerusalem. Jerusalem had been the capital city of their home country. The young people had never even seen Jerusalem but they wanted to go there because their parents always talked about how wonderful it was. Some of the people remembered the promise that God had made years ago to Jeremiah. God promised that, after seventy years, the people would go back to Jerusalem.

The old kings had made the Jews stay away from home. But now God worked in the heart of the new king. Cyrus' heart changed and he decided to let the Jews return to Jerusalem. Cyrus even sent money and supplies to help the Jews rebuild the temple. God kept his promise! After seventy years, the Jews were going home!

A man named Zerubbabel led the people to Jerusalem. When they got there things were not like they used to be. The beautiful temple of the Lord was just a pile of stones. Zerubbabel and the people knew that there would have to be a lot of work done.

One of the first things that the people did was to build an altar. They gave a sacrifice to the Lord to thank him for keeping his promises to them. They built the altar on the place where the temple used to be.

Next, the people began to build the temple all over again. First, they laid a very strong foundation. When they had finished the foundation, the young people cheered because it was a very exciting day. But the old people did not cheer. They remembered what the old temple looked like. They remembered all of the gold and silver and expensive ornaments. They knew that the new temple would never be the same.

Zerubbabel and the people worked very hard to finish the temple. Other people who lived near the temple did not like to see the Jews rebuilding the temple. They just wanted the Jews to go away so that they could have Jerusalem all to themselves.

These bad neighbours sent letters back to Persia. They told lies about the Jews. They wanted the Jews to get in trouble and have to leave. Sometimes the Jews felt very sad. God gave special messages to the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. These prophets told the people not to give up. God would give them strength. God promised to take care of them and God always keeps his promises!

After many letters, a final letter came back from Persia. The letter told the neighbours to leave the Jews alone! If the neighbours hurt the Jews then the King of Persia would send soldiers and hurt them! In fact, they had to give money to the Jews to help them build the temple.

Finally, the neighbour's left the Jews alone and the temple was finished. The Jews had a big celebration when the temple was completed. The priests began to work in the temple again. The people celebrated a big Passover Feast for seven days.

Many years passed. Not all of the Jews were in Jerusalem. Some of them were still back in Persia. One of those Jews was a man named Ezra. All of his life Ezra had loved the Law of the Lord. He was a teacher of the Law. He decided to go to Jerusalem and help the people learn how to obey the Law of the Lord. Since the king liked Ezra, he gave him gold and silver to take along on the trip. The king told Ezra to use the gold and silver to buy sacrifices to use in the temple. He also gave Ezra enough money so that he could take even more priests and teachers back to Jerusalem.

Ezra thought that he would be happy when he came to Jerusalem but he was sad instead. Ezra saw that the people were not obeying the Law of God. Ezra taught the people and helped them learn to obey God. Ezra reminded the people that God had kept his promises to them.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection, student interaction and/or emotion. [Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

Ezra's rebuilding the temple and restoring of the Law of God is told as one story in today's lesson but the Free Bible images above break it down into 3 different slideshows. Click on the links below to download these illustrations and/or slideshows:

[Rebuilding the Temple-part 1](#)

[Rebuilding the Temple-part 2](#)

[Ezra Returns to Jerusalem](#)

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Review Questions:

1. How long were the Jews in captivity? Seventy years
2. Which king allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem? Cyrus
3. What did Zerubbabel rebuild? The temple
4. Who travelled from Persia to Jerusalem to help the Jews learn to obey the Law of the Lord? Ezra

Song Suggestions:

- [God is Listening When We Pray](#)
- [Building Up the Temple](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Learning Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

- Find pictures of Solomon's temple and the temple that was rebuilt. Compare the two.
- Discuss things that you have to wait for (birthday, Christmas, etc). Sometimes we have to wait for God's promises.
- Sing "Building Up the Temple" and/or "Standing on the Promises"
- Bring building blocks to class and build a temple (be sure to place a scroll of the Law inside). After it is built, "destroy" it and let the children re-enact Zerubbabel returning to Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple. Next Ezra restored the law (7:8-10).

Craft:

- Trace a bible map and colour it in. Mark Persia and Jerusalem. Older children can use the map legend to measure how many miles the Jews had to travel to get back to their homeland.

Check the [Teaching Ideas](#) page on this website for ideas that are adaptable to any lesson.



[Click here for "Return to Jerusalem-Temple and Law" printables to print on A4 size paper](#)
[Click here for "Return to Jerusalem-Temple and Law" printables \(Letter size-USA\)](#)

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Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page and puzzle worksheets-Exiles return \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Colouring page and puzzle worksheets-rebuilding altar and temple \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Colouring page and puzzle worksheets-opposition to rebuilding \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Colouring page and puzzle worksheets-completion and dedication of temple \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Colouring page and puzzle worksheets-the people confess their sin \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Chart: Chronology of Judah's Return \(Bible charts\)](#)
- [Video: "Virtual Reconstruction Of Second Temple" by israelarchaeology. Youtube video is just under 8 minutes long.](#)

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