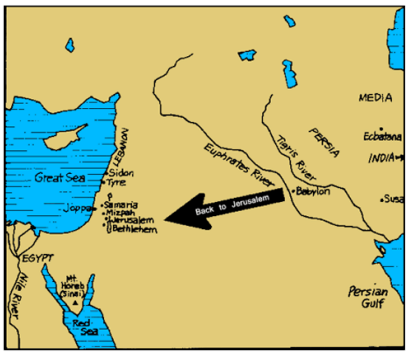
Return to Jerusalem- Temple and Law



Scripture Reference: Ezra 1-10

Suggested Theme: God keeps His promises to us. We can trust He speaks the truth.

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 always promised that the people would return to their land someday. 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 has two parts. The first part—Zerubbabel rebuilding the temple—is recorded in Ezra 1-6. It occurred around 520-516 BC, before Queen Esther. The second part—Ezra restoring 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 1: Ezra chapters 1-6

Cyrus 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 temple’s destruction 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 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 their seventy years 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

©2011-2026 Mission Bible Class, used by permission. Not to be sold. Find more free lessons at https://missionbibleclass.org/

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 in the temple and not give up.

Leaders from the neighbouring nations sent a report back to King Darius, hoping 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).

Part 2: Ezra chapters 7-10

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. His expenses were paid, and priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and temple servants accompanied him. Ezra had acquired the art of writing and 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 100 talents of silver available from his own treasury. He also provided 100 measures of wheat and about 100 baths of wine. With the offering of money, he told Ezra to buy animals to 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 God's hand in all this and the blessing only He could give. He 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 you begin, wrap some yummy snacks in a colourful package. Bring a stopwatch or a timepiece with a second hand to the session. Tell the children you promise to let them open it in seventy seconds. As they wait, they 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.

The Story:

For seventy years, the Jews had been away from 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, the capital of their home country. The young people had never seen Jerusalem but wanted to go there because their parents

©2011-2026 Mission Bible Class, used by permission. Not to be sold. Find more free lessons at https://missionbibleclass.org/

always talked about how wonderful it was. Some people remembered the promise God had made years ago to Jeremiah. God promised that the people would return to Jerusalem after seventy years.

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 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 there would have to be much work done.

One of the first things the people did was build an altar. They gave a sacrifice to the Lord to thank Him for keeping His promises to them. They built the altar in 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. The young people cheered when they finished the foundation because it was an exciting day. But the old people did not cheer. They remembered what the old temple looked like, all of the gold, 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 always keep 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! They had to give money to the Jews to help them build the temple.

Finally, the neighbours left the Jews alone, and the temple was finished. The Jews celebrated the completion of the temple with a big feast. The priests began to work in the temple again, and 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 in the temple. He also gave Ezra enough money so that he could take even more priests and teachers back to Jerusalem.

Ezra thought he would be happy when he came to Jerusalem but 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.

top

Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various 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 or other group participation.

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.

©2011-2026 Mission Bible Class, used by permission. Not to be sold. Find more free lessons at https://missionbibleclass.org/

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

View this slideshow and download it from the original source:
https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/rebuilding-temple-1/

View this slideshow and download it from the original source:
https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/rebuilding-temple-2/

View this slideshow and download it from the original source:
https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/ezra/

top

Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

Review:

- How long were the Jews in captivity? (Seventy years)
- Which king allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem? (Cyrus)
- What did Zerubbabel rebuild? (The temple)
- Who celebrated when the temple began to be rebuilt? Who did not? (The young Jews rejoiced, but the old Jews were sad)
- What did the neighbouring people have to do to the Jews in Jerusalem? (The king of Persia required them to give the Jews money to rebuild the temple)
- Who travelled from Persia to Jerusalem to serve as a priest in the temple? (Ezra)
- What did Ezra do when he arrived in Jerusalem? (He helped the Jews learn to obey the Law of the Lord)
- What do you think the Jews learned from these events with Zerubbabel or Ezra?
- What did you learn about God from this story?

Reflection:

- What question do you have for God about this story?
- Why do you think God had the Jews wait 70 years until they could return to the land of Israel?
- Do you think some Jews stopped believing they would go back to Israel after waiting so long for it to happen?
- If you were a Jewish person living in captivity, and the king said you could return to Israel, would you stay in the foreign land or go to Israel?
- What do you think the temple looked like when they first started building it?
- Why do you think the neighbouring people didn't like that the Jews were building the temple?
- How do you think Ezra felt when he arrived in Jerusalem but saw that the Jews were not following God and His laws?

©2011-2026 Mission Bible Class, used by permission. Not to be sold. Find more free lessons at https://missionbibleclass.org/

- Has someone ever broken their promise to you? How does it feel?
- What other promises do you remember that God has made? What promises has Jesus made?
- What promises has God made to you or all of us in the Bible?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- God is Listening When We Pray
- Building Up the Temple
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

top

Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Find pictures of Solomon's temple and the rebuilt temple. Compare the two.
- Discuss things you must wait for (like birthdays or Christmas). Sometimes, we have to wait for God's promises.
- Use building blocks to 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).

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- 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 travelled to return to their homeland.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

©2011-2026 Mission Bible Class, used by permission. Not to be sold. Find more free lessons at https://missionbibleclass.org/

top

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 the 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 that is just under 8 minutes long.

top

Date
2026/09/13

©2011-2026 Mission Bible Class, used by permission. Not to be sold. Find more free lessons at https://missionbibleclass.org/