

Rebuilding The Altar And The Temple

EZRA 3:1-13

MEMORY VERSE

PSALM 136:1

“Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

Several drinking straws and one large balloon per team.

Two balloons from the previous game and masking tape.

Construction paper, butcher paper, scissors, markers, and glue sticks.

ATTENTION GRABBER

Working Side By Side

For this game you will need several drinking straws and one large balloon per team. The object is to see which team can blow up their balloon by working together. (The straw will need to fit snug in opening of balloon for this game to work.)

Cut the straws into 3 equal pieces. Give each child a piece. Choose teams (number will depend on class size, 5 per team is a good number). Have the teams line up with their straws.

Give the first person in the line a balloon. The children will use the straw to blow the balloon up with one big breath. Then they will pass it to the next person who will insert their straw into the balloon and blow one big breath. It is important that they only blow one breath. They will also need to be careful not to let any air out of the balloon as it is passed. At the end of the line after everyone has had a chance to complete their blowing, compare balloon size and determine a winner.

God brought His people back to their homeland. They worked together to build the altar and the temple. God wants us to be faithful to do what He has called us to do.

Note: Save your balloons from this activity for another game later.

LESSON TIME!

God's promise had been fulfilled! After 70 years of captivity, God's people returned to their homeland. Cyrus, the king of Persia, had released the children of Israel with permission to rebuild their temple and worship their God.

Now, with a renewed heart and a determination to obey, the people set themselves to the task at hand. The consequences of sin and rebellion had been devastating to the people of Israel; but now, they would celebrate God's faithfulness.

EZRA 3:1-3

And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.

Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God.

Though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and evening burnt offerings.

Finally, the children of Israel gathered together in their homeland to start rebuilding. They would rebuild their lives and their relationship with God--God had taught them much during the 70 years of captivity. And, they would rebuild the temple of the Lord. The task of rebuilding the temple the Babylonians had destroyed 70 years earlier would be overwhelming; yet, because they knew God was with them, they were determined.

The people set up the altar as one of their first official acts. It symbolized God's presence and protection and demonstrated their commitment to serve God alone. Zerubbabel sacrificed burnt offerings as the Law of Moses instructed (Leviticus 1-7). After 70 years of captivity, their attention was now focused on their relationship with God. *Daily*, they sought the forgiveness of their sins and consecrated their lives to God. *Daily*, they sought His guidance. How aware the people were of the consequences of disobedience and rebellion to God! The people did not want to go down that path again.

The people were determined to put God first. We read they offered sacrifices to God even though they feared attack from the surrounding people of the land. After the Northern Kingdom of Israel was defeated by the Assyrians and her people taken captive in 722 BC, foreigners had been forced to resettle in the land. (It was a common practice of Assyrians to control their conquered people by resettling foreign people into the land they conquered.) The Jews felt threatened, fearing this group of people would want to keep the land of Judah to themselves.

EZRA 3:4-5

They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day.

Afterwards they offered the regular burnt offering, and those for New Moons and for all the appointed feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and those of everyone who willingly offered a freewill offering to the LORD.

The celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles lasted seven days. During this time, the people lived in temporary dwellings such as tents and booths just as their ancestors had done many years before as they journeyed through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. The feast would remind the people of God's past protection and guidance in the wilderness and of His continued love for them. Restoration with God starts with the heart! The people of God were restoring their worship once again and turning their hearts to God.

EZRA 3:6-9

From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, although the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid.

They also gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began work and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the LORD.

Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers, Kadmiel with his sons, and the sons of Judah, arose as one to oversee those working on the house of God: the sons of Henadad with their sons and their brethren the Levites.

It took from September to June just to prepare to build the temple. During this time, the altar was built, materials were ordered and collected, and workers were hired. Time must be taken to make preparations if the job was going to be done well.

It took many people working together to accomplish such a task. God has designed that His plans and ministry be accomplished by His children working together. As we consider the ministry of the church today, each member of the body of Christ is vital to His plan and purpose (1 Corinthians 12). May we be faithful to serve the Lord with the talents and gifts God has given us. **Let us be faithful to God.**

Once the altar had been established so they could worship God, the people set out to rebuild the temple foundation; it would be no small task! They would face opposition from their neighbors as well as lack of resources.

Was it a wise move to begin construction of the altar and the temple before the city walls? It certainly seems the walls would have provided the security they needed—protection from the enemy—in order to complete their task. Yet, consider this--if God was not going to protect them, no wall would provide protection for them. After all, the wall stood at one time, but God allowed them to be overtaken by Babylon. It's more important to trust in God—His protection and provision—and to put Him first than to build a wall.

The children of Israel were certainly learning to depend on God! When they were carried off by the Babylonians, they were large in number; now they were few in number, weak, and surrounded by enemies. If ever they needed to rely on God's power, it was now. With a strong sense of dependency on God, they realized the importance of obeying Him from the heart, and not merely out of habit. A sense of dependency on the Lord will strengthen our relationship with God. For, when we must have God's help to complete a task, we give good attention to our relationship with Him. **Let us be faithful to God.**

“Let's Work Together”

The goal of this game is to work as a team and finish “your share” of the work on the foundation of the temple. You will need the 2 balloons from the previous game and masking tape.

Before class, mark out with the tape a large rectangle in the middle of the floor. Choose 2 teams and have them stand around the rectangle. Each team should stand on 2 connecting sides of the rectangle (“L” shape). Blow up the balloons and hand them to the first person in each team.

On your command, the children will be passing the balloon between their legs to the person behind them, then over their head to the next person. They will continue passing until they get to the end of the line in their team. The first team that gets the balloon to the end of their line has to wait for the other team to get their balloon to the end. At that point, the person at the end of the line will walk up to the front of their team line. Then at your command go through the same process.

Keep doing this until everyone has gone through the line. When they are done, gather the children and ask them what they noticed happening (the line began to move a little each time the person from the back of the line came forward). Working together as brothers and sisters in the Lord's body, we can make progress just as the Israelites did on the temple.

EZRA 3:10-11

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel.

And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

At last the temple foundation was finished! Now it was time to celebrate. Completing the foundation required great effort on the part of all involved. Everyone praised God for what had been done through many with His help and enabling. God had provided the talents, abilities, strength, and leadership to do the job. With a God-given desire, the people had remained faithful to what God had called them to do. **Let us be faithful to God.**

The people of Israel had endured great suffering because of their sinful rebellion towards God, but now united together in heart-felt praise, they sang of God's goodness towards them. Though the people had been faithless in the past, God still remained faithful to them, for His love endures forever.

EZRA 3:12-13

But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy,

so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.

Some of the very old men had seen the old temple before its destruction, 70 years prior. These men wept. Looking back and remembering the former glory of Solomon's temple, they were, no doubt, reminded of the devastation of the temple and Jerusalem—the bitter consequences of rebellion against the one true God.

What a time of contrasting emotions. Most had never seen the temple and rejoiced greatly at God's goodness and faithfulness; others wept, remembering the former glory of the temple. Both emotions were legitimate. God's work among us can stimulate us both to rejoice over the goodness of His grace and to mourn over our sins that have required Him to intervene. **Let us be faithful to God.**

The celebration—shouts of joy and sobs of sorrow—was heard from far away. The foundation of the temple had been laid. God had been faithful to bring His people out of captivity and fulfill His promise to rebuild the temple. The consequences of sin had been devastating. Yet, God had not forsaken His people. He remained faithful in His commitment to them. Seventy years later, His people, with a renewed heart, were faithful in their response to Him and worked hand-and-hand, side-by-side, to see His purposes accomplished.

God is faithful to us. **Let us be faithful to God!** May we offer our lives--our talents and abilities--to serve Him and see His purposes accomplished. God has great blessings in store for those who will choose His path.

“We Need Each Other to Do God’s Work!”

This craft will be a project you can work on together to decorate the bulletin board or wall in your classroom. You will need construction paper, butcher paper, scissors, markers, and glue sticks.

Use a large sheet of butcher paper for the background. Using construction or another piece of butcher paper (different color), cut out a large circle. In the middle of the circle write, “We Need Each Other to Do God’s Work!” Next give each child a piece of regular paper. Have them trace their hands and write their names on the hands. They can then cut out the pictures of their hands and decorate them in any other way they would like to. Next, paste the hands to the bulletin board.

As you do this craft, talk about the importance of working together while doing God’s work and what it means to be faithful to God.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to be faithful and obedient to God and to use their talents and abilities for Him. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.