

GOD BROUGHT HIS PEOPLE HOME

EZRA 1-3



KEY PASSAGE: Isaiah 25:9

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How did God plan to fix what sin broke? Before He created the world, God planned to send the Messiah.

CHRIST CONNECTION: Just as God promised, He brought His people back from exile to Jerusalem. One day, God will bring all His people together—all who trust in Jesus to save them from sin. There will be no crying that day. The people will worship Him in the new heaven and new earth.

STORY POINT: The exile was over, and God brought His people back to Jerusalem.



PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

LEADER Bible Study

The Bible is described as a book about God fulfilling His promises to His people, and in Ezra 1–3, we see how God fulfilled the promise He made to bring His people home after 70 years in captivity. God used King Cyrus of Persia to issue a decree that allowed the Israelites to return home.

Just as the prophecies of Daniel remind us of God’s control over the kingdoms of the world, so do the first few verses of Ezra. We learn how God “roused” the spirit of King Cyrus to move him to release the Israelites. God’s control over kings and kingdoms was even more evident because Cyrus didn’t send the Israelites home empty-handed. They returned with resources provided by the king and their neighbors. Only God could reverse the Israelites’ fortunes in such a quick way—from exiles with nothing to a returning remnant with resources to rebuild.

God often works through a remnant of people, no matter how small that group may be. Once this remnant of God’s people returned to their homeland, they set about the process of rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. At the center of their rebuild, the leaders of the people rightly recognized the importance of worship. Just a few months after returning from exile, they began rebuilding the altar of God so they could restart their worship according to God’s commands. They knew the rebuild would only succeed when God’s people turned to Him in proper worship, turning away from their sin and obeying Him.

Before the foundation of the temple was laid, the leaders rebuilt the altar, demonstrating their desire for God’s people to atone for their sin. Through opposition and uncertainty, they established a place for the priests to offer burnt sacrifices on behalf of the people.

Like the remnant of Israelites, we need to remember that true restoration begins with a reconnection of God through worship. We were created to worship God and glorify His name. Encourage kids to remember that before we try to rebuild the outer elements of our lives, we must first prioritize the exaltation of our Savior.



PREPARE

THE WEEK PRIOR

Prepare your heart to teach; plan the session



WELCOME

10–15 MINUTES

Greet kids and open the session



LEARN

25–30 MINUTES

Teach kids the story of the gospel



LOVE

15–20 MINUTES

Lead kids to love the God of the gospel



LIVE

15–20 MINUTES

Lead kids to live out the mission of the gospel



PREPARE

PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

GATHER Supplies

Keep a regular supply of the following items available at all times: Bibles, pens or pencils, markers, crayons, colored pencils, scissors, glue or tape, paper.



WELCOME

Activity Page

- "Find the Way Home" activity page

Session Starter (Option 2)

- wooden blocks, 12 per group



LOVE

Review & Bible Skills

- Small Group Timeline and Map Set



LEARN

Introduce the Session

- countdown video
- Story Point Poster

Big Picture Question

- Big Picture Question Poster

Review the Timeline

- Giant Timeline

Tell the Bible Story

- "God Brought His People Home" video
- Bible Story Picture Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster from the Bible story Solomon Built the Temple (optional)

Questions from Kids

- "Unit 17, Session 1" Questions from Kids video

Missions Moment

- "Jim and Jean Leeper" missions video

Key Passage Activity

- Key Passage Poster
- "This Is the Lord (Isaiah 25:9)"
- worship song of your choice (optional)
- masking tape
- wooden blocks, 2 sets



LIVE

Activity Choice (Option 1)

- hula hoops, 2
- objects like fake money, gold costume jewelry, stuffed animals, bowls, cloth, etc.; 8–10

Activity Choice (Option 2)

- inflated balloons, 10
- baskets or boxes, 2

Journal and Prayer

- Journal Page
- "What's the Order?" activity page



WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

SAY “What’s the longest trip you’ve taken? Where did you go? What was the first thing you did when you returned home?”

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the “Find the Way Home” activity page.

SAY “Today, we will learn that God’s people were able to return to Jerusalem after being in exile for seventy years.”

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: MAP IT



Provide each kid with a piece of paper and markers. Prompt kids to think about a route they travel often. It may be a route to school or to a sports activity or to church. Lead kids to create a map that shows how they go from their home to a particular location. Challenge kids to include roads (even if they don’t know the names) and any landmarks along the way, such as stores, parks, neighborhoods, etc. Encourage kids to include a map key, if desired. Then invite kids to share their maps with everyone.

SAY “Did your route on your map require you to travel far? How long do you think it would take you to walk to the location on your map? [Allow responses.] Today, we will learn how God’s people were released to go back to Jerusalem, which was more than 800 miles away. Some scholars believe it took them around four months to walk the distance. Let’s get ready to hear how God kept His promise and helped His people go back home.”

OPTION 2: BUILD IT

Form kids into groups of three or four. Provide each group with 12 wooden blocks. Lead groups to spread about the room. On your start, challenge each group to place the blocks into two rows of six. The last group to complete the challenge is out. Then direct groups to stack the blocks into three rows of four. Again, the last group to complete the challenge is out. Repeat, giving groups new challenges each time until one group remains. Play again as time allows.

SAY “Today, we’ll see how the exile was over, and God brought His people back to Jerusalem. When the people returned home, they began to rebuild the temple. Just as you laid various foundations with the blocks, God’s people began rebuilding the temple by first laying its foundation. Let’s get ready to learn more.”

Transition from **WELCOME** to **LEARN**





INTRODUCE the Bible Story

1 INTRODUCE THE SESSION (3 minutes)

Show the countdown video as you transition to introduce the Bible story. Set it to end as the session begins.

SAY “ Hi, kids! My name is [your name], and I’m so glad you are here and ready to read God’s Word. Did you bring a Bible with you? If so, please hold it up. [Distribute Bibles to kids who need one. Invite kids to turn to Ezra 1.]

Today, we will be in the book of Ezra as we learn how **THE EXILE WAS OVER, AND GOD BROUGHT HIS PEOPLE BACK TO JERUSALEM!** [Display the Story Point Poster.] After 70 years, God’s promise to bring His people home came true. We’ll see how God’s people arrived in Jerusalem and began rebuilding the temple. Let’s pray together: ‘God, thank You for keeping Your promises. We can always trust You and know You will always do what You promise. Amen.’ ”

2 BIG PICTURE QUESTION (1 minute)

Display the Big Picture Question Poster.

SAY “ We will learn a new big picture question today. Our big picture question is, **How did God plan to fix what sin broke?** What did sin break? [Allow responses.] Sin has broken our relationship with God, and we are separated from God because of our sin. Sin has also broken our relationship with other people because we don’t rightly love one another as God intended. And sin broke the good world God created. Sadly, we have sickness and all kinds of terrible events in our world.

Now, let’s answer the question: **How did God plan to fix what sin broke?** The answer is, **Before He created the world, God planned to send the Messiah.** Only Jesus, the Messiah, can fix what sin broke. When we trust in Jesus, He brings us back to God. Jesus also changes our hearts so we can love God and one another rightly. One day, Jesus will make this broken world brand new when He creates a new heaven and earth. ”

3 REVIEW THE TIMELINE (1 minute)

Show the Giant Timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

SAY “ After Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, the people of Judah were taken to Babylon. During this time, God remained faithful to His people. We learned how God gave Daniel wisdom, visions, and rescued him from the lions’ den. We also saw how God saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace. All throughout the seventy years in exile, God was working out His plan to one day bring them back to Jerusalem. Today, we will learn how God brought them back home and helped them rebuild the temple. ”



LEARN the Bible Story

1 TELL THE BIBLE STORY: VIDEO OR STORYTELLER (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Ezra 1, 3:1-5,8,10-13. Use the Bible storytelling tips to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “God Brought His People Home.” Use the bold text to retell or review the story.

GOD BROUGHT HIS PEOPLE HOME

“God, through the prophet Jeremiah, promised that He would bring his people back to Jerusalem after seventy years of captivity. Just as God promised, **King Cyrus of Persia issued a decree, saying:**

“The LORD has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build him a house in Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people may go to Jerusalem to build the house of the LORD, the God of Israel. Give your silver, gold, and livestock to them so they may bring these gifts to Jerusalem and offer them to God.”

God’s people prepared to go to Jerusalem and build the Lord’s house. All their neighbors supported them with gifts of silver, gold, livestock, and valuables. King Cyrus also gave back some of the riches that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple of God.

A few months after they arrived in Jerusalem, Jeshua the priest, Zerubbabel, and their brothers began to build the altar of God so that they could sacrifice burnt offerings on it morning and evening according to the law of Moses. They also celebrated all the festivals and holy days as the Lord commanded in the law. **Then, they began to buy the supplies needed to rebuild the temple.**

Two years after God’s people arrived in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and their brothers appointed the Levites to oversee the work on the Lord’s house. Once they had laid the foundation of the temple, the priests led the people to praise God with trumpets and cymbals. They sang, “The LORD is good. His faithful love to Israel endures forever.” All the people gave a great shout of praise.

While most people were happy, some of the older priests remembered the first temple. This new foundation was not as magnificent as the original temple, and they wept loudly. The people could not tell the difference between those who were weeping loudly and those who were shouting for joy.

Christ Connection: Just as God promised, He brought His people back from exile to Jerusalem. One day, God will bring all His people together—all who trust in Jesus to save them from sin. There will be no crying that day. The people will worship Him in the new heaven and new earth. ”

STORYTELLING TIPS

Repeat it: Prompt kids to say, “The Lord is good. His faithful love endures forever,” after you say it in the story.

Display it: Display an example of the original temple using the Bible Story Picture Poster from the Bible story Solomon Built the Temple (Unit 12, Session 2).



2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

SAY “ God’s people had lived in Babylon many years, and the kingdom of Babylon had been conquered by the Persians. Who was the new king, and what did God move him to do? Look at Ezra 1:1-2 [Ask a volunteer to read Ezra 1:1-2 aloud.] Cyrus of Persia had become king, and he issued a decree allowing anyone to return to Jerusalem and begin rebuilding the Lord’s temple. Even though Cyrus was king, God was in control and His plans for His people would be fulfilled.

How did God provide for His people so they could rebuild the temple and have supplies to meet their needs? Look at Ezra 1:5-7. [Ask a volunteer to read Ezra 1:5-7 aloud.] God also moved the people’s spirits to give treasures and materials to help with the rebuilding of the temple. Not only were God’s people released to go home, but God provided for all their needs.

Two years after God’s people arrived in Jerusalem, they began to rebuild the temple. Finally, the people finished laying the temple’s foundation. How did the people respond? Look at Ezra 3:10-12. [Ask a volunteer to read Ezra 3:10-12 aloud.] Some people praised God and were happy the foundation was complete. Other people were sad because they missed the first temple. Yet despite both reactions, God had been faithful to His people. **THE EXILE WAS OVER, AND GOD BROUGHT HIS PEOPLE BACK TO JERUSALEM** just as He promised. The people had many reasons to be thankful and offer praise to God for His mercy shown to them. ”

3 GOSPEL DISCUSSION

SAY “ Like God’s people were exiled from their home because of their sin, our sin separates us from God. Just as God promised, He brought His people back from exile to Jerusalem. When we trust in Jesus, God will bring us into right relationship with Him. One day, God will bring all His people together—all who trust in Jesus to save them from sin. There will be no crying that day. The people will worship Him in the new heaven and new earth. ”

(Tip: Use Scripture and the Gospel Plan Poster to explain how to become a Christian. Create an environment where kids are welcome to ask questions about what it means to follow Jesus.)

4 QUESTIONS FROM KIDS (3 minutes)

Show the “Unit 17, Session 1” Questions from Kids video. Prompt kids to discuss:

1. How much do we need to trust in Jesus to go to heaven?
2. This earth is not Christians’ forever home. Why will the new heaven and earth be better?

5 MISSIONS MOMENT (3 minutes)

SAY “ A man named Jim Leeper knew he wanted to be a missionary when he was 12 years old. Years later, in 1962, Jim and his wife, Jean, took a month-long tour of Europe. After the trip, Jim began to feel led to become a pastor of a church in Bamberg, Germany. Jim pastored the church in Germany for three years. Then in 1965, Jim and Jean were appointed as missionaries to Ankara, Turkey. Jim pastored a church in Turkey for 12 years. ”



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

Play the missions video. Tell kids that the Leepers served as missionaries for 32 years before retiring in 1999. Pray, thanking God for missionaries who share the good news about Jesus.

6 KEY PASSAGE ACTIVITY (5 minutes)

Before the session, write two or three words of the key passage on individual wooden blocks. Place masking tape on the blocks and write the words on the tape. Create two sets. Show the Key Passage Poster. Lead kids in reading aloud Isaiah 25:9 together.

SAY “ God’s people were released from captivity in Babylon just as God promised. When they returned home, they began rebuilding a house of worship for God. They recognized God’s faithful love and that He deserved their worship. God deserves our worship too! ”

Form kids into two groups and challenge them to place the blocks in the correct order of the key passage. The first group to do so wins.

Lead kids to sing “This Is the Lord (Isaiah 25:9).” You may also choose to sing a worship song of your choice.

7 PRAY (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before transitioning to Love.

SAY “ Dear God, we know only You can save us. Thank You for sending Jesus to be our Savior. Help us keep our eyes on You and worship You. Amen. ”

Transition from **LEARN** to **LOVE**





LOVE God by Applying the Story

1 REVIEW & BIBLE SKILLS (5 minutes)

Distribute Bibles and display the Old Testament Mediterranean Map. Guide kids to open their Bibles to Ezra 1. Explain that the book of Ezra is in the History division of the Old Testament. Tell kids that the book of Ezra highlights several leaders, including Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

Consider pointing out the nation of Babylon (E11) and Jerusalem (G10) on the Old Testament Mediterranean Map. Choose a volunteer to read aloud Ezra 1:1-2 or ask the kids to follow along as you read the verses aloud.

SAY “ Long before Cyrus was king, God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah and promised that His people would return to Jerusalem after 70 years in exile. Even when another ruler, like Cyrus, took the throne, God was in control and would accomplish His plans.

No matter what we face or what circumstances we go through, God remains in control. God planned good for His people, even though they had sinned against Him. And God plans good for those who love Him. We can respond to this by trusting, obeying, and worshiping God, knowing He loves us and reigns over everything. ”

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

SAY “ When was a time you needed to remember that God is in control? ”

Answers will vary. Discuss how God is the King of kings and everything works according to His good plans. Share how God knows what we need, just like He provided for His people's return home. Tell kids that God allows circumstances to come into our lives so we will depend on Him, trust Him, and allow Him to make us more like Jesus.

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Prov. 19:21)

SAY “ Why can we trust God's Word, the Bible? ”

Remind kids that God's Word is always true. Emphasize how many of the promises God made in the Bible have come true, such as God's plan to send Jesus into the world to save sinners. Prompt kids to think about how they can turn to God's Word when they feel uncertain, scared, or anxious. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Isa. 40:8.)

SAY “ After the foundation was laid, the people praised God and said that His love endures forever. What does this mean? ”

Tell kids that God chose His people, Israel, and promised to be faithful to them. He loved them, not based on what they had done, but based on His grace. Explain that Christians have been accepted by God through faith in Jesus, and God's love for them will never end because the righteousness of Jesus covers them. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read 1 John 4:9-10.)

Transition from **LOVE** to **LIVE**





THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: BRING THEM HOME

Form kids into two teams and guide them to line up at one end of the room. Place a hula hoop at the opposite end of the room from the teams. Inside each hula hoop place 8–10 objects like fake money, gold costume jewelry, stuffed animals, bowls, cloth, etc. Challenge each team to send one kid at a time to grab an item and bring it back to their team. The team to bring their items back to “home base” first wins.

SAY “ Today, we learned that after 70 years in exile, God’s people were freed to return home. God provided for His people by stirring their neighbors’ hearts to give them gifts of silver, gold, livestock, and other valuables so they could rebuild God’s house. In God’s love, He provides for us as well. Most importantly, God provided His Son, Jesus, to save people from sin. ”

OPTION 2: PROMISE POP



Before the session, write each of the following Bible references on individual strips of paper: John 1:12-13; John 5:25; John 14:27; 1 John 1:9; 1 Peter 1:3-4. Create two sets. Then inflate 10 balloons. Place a strip of paper in each balloon, creating two sets.

Form kids into two teams and provide each team with a Bible, a pen, and paper. Place each set of balloons in a basket or a box. Explain that teams will send a kid to retrieve a balloon from their box and bring it to their team. Together, the team will pop the balloon, recover the paper, and look up the reference. Then teams will write down what the verse promises. Repeat until each team pops their balloons. The team to pop all their balloons first wins.

SAY “ God kept His promise to bring His people home, and He has promised followers of Jesus many wonderful gifts. He promises eternal life, peace, forgiveness of sin, and so much more! God’s love endures forever, and He will keep His promises. ”

2 JOURNAL AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page. As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas.

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God’s glory and my good?
- Are there promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

Review the gospel and encourage kids to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions. Then pray, thanking God for being in control and for keeping His promises. As time allows, lead kids to complete “What’s the Order?” on the activity page.