

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 large 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

- "Finish It" activity page



LOVE

Review & Bible Skills

- Small Group Timeline and Map Set (optional)



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
- picture of a foundation (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)" song
- worship song of your choice (optional)



LIVE

Activity Choice (Option 1)

- paper plates, 1 per kid
- graham crackers, 1 per kid
- mini-marshmallows, 20 per kid
- icing tubs
- plastic knives
- paper towels

Activity Choice (Option 2)

- dry erase board
- dry erase marker

Reflection and Prayer

- Bible story coloring 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 do you love most about your home? What do you like to do at home?”

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the “Finish It” activity page.

| **SAY** “Today, we will see how God’s people came home to Jerusalem and how they finished building the new temple’s foundation.”

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: GATHER TOGETHER



Direct kids to spread out across the room. Select a volunteer to be It. When you say go, It will try to tag a kid. When a kid is tagged, he or she will form a chain by linking arms with It and assist It in tagging other kids. As other kids are tagged, the chain will grow. The chain continues tagging others until all kids have been tagged. Play again as time allows, choosing new kids to be It.

| **SAY** “Nice work gathering up all of your friends! This game reminds me how God’s people had been exiled away from Jerusalem, but God had a plan to gather them together so they could go home. Today, we’ll see how **THE EXILE WAS OVER, AND GOD BROUGHT HIS PEOPLE BACK TO JERUSALEM.**”

OPTION 2: A FIRM FOUNDATION

Before the session, write the following Bible book names on individual sheets of paper or choose your own: Exodus, Ruth, Ezra, Jeremiah, John, Ephesians, Hebrews. Create two sets. Form kids into two teams and provide each team with a Bible and tape. Tell kids that you will distribute a set of papers with the names of Bible books on them. Explain that groups will work together to find the book in their Bible. When they do, they should send one kid to bring the Bible to you and show you the book. Then the team can tape their Bible book paper to a wall to begin laying a “foundation.” The first team to find all the books and lay a “foundation” wins.

| **SAY** “Today, we will see how God’s people returned to Jerusalem and began to build the new temple’s foundation. Yet, the temple was only a building. The people needed a better foundation to trust in. Jesus is the firm foundation we can build our life upon. The whole Bible points to Jesus and tells us how He came to save us from sin. Jesus will never disappoint us or let us down. He is faithful, and all who trust in Him will be gathered to live with Him forever.”

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 today we will be reading a story from the book of Ezra. The book of Ezra is in the Old Testament. Did you bring a Bible with you? [Distribute Bibles to kids who need one. Invite kids to turn to Ezra 1.]

We have learned that God exiled the people of Judah to Babylon because of their sin. However, God promised that the exile would not last forever. Today, we will learn that **THE EXILE WAS OVER, AND GOD BROUGHT HIS PEOPLE BACK TO JERUSALEM!** [Display the Story Point Poster.] Let’s pray together: ‘God, thank You for bringing Your people back to Jerusalem. As we read Your Word, help us understand that You keep Your promises. 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?** Before we answer the question, let’s first discuss what it means that sin broke something. Because sin has come into the world, it has broken our relationship with God and with one another. We are separated from God because of sin. And we don’t rightly love God or people because of sin. Sin also 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 helps us love one another. Jesus will one day make this broken world brand new when He creates a new heaven and earth. Just like God planned for Jesus to fix what sin broke, God planned to rescue His people from the exile. Today, we will learn that God brought His people out of exile and back to Jerusalem. ”

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 70 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

Emphasize emotion: Read the story with great emotion, emphasizing the people’s joy and sadness.

Display it: Display a picture of a foundation of a house. Take time to explain how a foundation supports what is being built. Remind kids that Jesus Christ is the foundation we build our lives upon.



2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

SAY “ God always keeps His promises! He promised to bring His people back to Jerusalem, and He did. Although King Cyrus was the ruler over Persia, God was always in control of everything that was happening. God worked through King Cyrus to bring an end to the exile of His people. Do you remember what King Cyrus gave God’s people to take back home with them? **[Allow responses.]** Their neighbors gave them gold, silver, and animals. The king even gave back some of the treasures that had been taken from God’s temple! God provided for His people just like He provided for us. We can always trust Him no matter what.

When the people returned to Jerusalem, they rebuilt the altar, offered sacrifices, and obeyed the commands of God’s law. What did the people do next? **[Allow responses.]** The people began to rebuild the temple by laying down the temple’s foundation.

Why were some people sad when they saw the new foundation for the temple? **[Allow responses.]** Some of the elders remembered the beauty of the old temple and were sad those days were gone. But God had a bigger plan. God brought His people back to their land, and He was planning to bring people back to Himself through the promised Savior. 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. ”

3 GOSPEL DISCUSSION

SAY “ God rescued His people from exile. In a similar way, God has made the way for people to be rescued from sin. Jesus Christ, God’s Son, took our sin upon Himself on the cross so we can be forgiven. Those who trust in Jesus have been brought back to God. Please let me know if you have any questions about how you can trust in Jesus. ”

(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)

Show the Key Passage Poster. Lead kids in reading aloud Isaiah 25:9 together.

SAY “We can rejoice because the salvation God promised has come through Jesus Christ! Let’s learn more about this truth through our new key passage.”

Read the key passage aloud as a group, ending with the verse reference. Invite one kid to close her eyes, while the rest of the kids recite the key passage aloud again. End with one kid saying the verse reference in a disguised voice. Encourage the kid with her eyes closed to guess who said the reference. Repeat, allowing different kids to have a turn guessing.

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 “God, You fulfilled Your promise of salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Help us share the good news of salvation with others. 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 3. Explain that the book of Ezra is in the History division of the Old Testament. Through the writings of Ezra, we learn about the events that happened following the exile.

Consider pointing out the nation of Babylon (E11) and Jerusalem (G10) on the Old Testament Mediterranean Map. Choose a volunteer to read aloud Ezra 3:11 or ask the kids to follow along as you read the verse aloud.

SAY “ After many years in exile, God faithfully brought His people back to Jerusalem. Many of the people praised God and rejoiced in His faithfulness when they saw the foundation of the temple. God had not forgotten His people, and He made the way for them to begin rebuilding the temple.

No matter what we face each day, God remains faithful to those who have trusted in Jesus. Even when we face times that may be hard or confusing, we can trust God and rejoice that He has provided what we need most: salvation from sin through Jesus! ”

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

| **SAY** “ Why did the people begin to rebuild the temple? ”

Explain that the temple was the place where God’s people offered sacrifices for their sins, worshiped Him, and prayed to Him. Remind kids that the temple represented God’s presence among His people.

| **SAY** “ How did we see God work through people to accomplish His plans? ”

Discuss how God’s will for the temple to be rebuilt came through King Cyrus’ decree. Even though Cyrus was a king, God was in control of everything. Remind kids that God also moved the people’s hearts to give gifts for the temple, providing for His people’s needs as the altar and temple’s foundation were rebuilt.

| **SAY** “ Some people were sad because they missed the old temple. How can we respond when situations don’t turn out like we hope? ”

Tell kids that because we live in a broken world, we will experience times when we are disappointed, sad, uncertain, or even afraid. We can honestly confess our feelings to God, knowing He loves and cares for us. And we can ask Him to help us trust Him and remember that He is faithful no matter what. Even when we face struggles, those who trust in Jesus have the joy of their salvation.





THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: EDIBLE FOUNDATION



Provide each kid with a paper plate, graham cracker, and 20 mini marshmallows. Place tubs of icing and plastic knives at tables. Direct kids to build a model of the temple's foundation by using icing to stick the marshmallows to the graham cracker. Tell kids that the marshmallows represent the "stones" of the foundation. Kids may use the knife to gently spread the icing on the graham cracker. Then kids may place the marshmallows in rows on the graham cracker. Kids may also choose to build their foundation upward by icing marshmallows to be placed on top of the bottom row.

Distribute paper towels for clean-up and invite kids to eat their model or take it home.

SAY “ For any building to stand tall and strong, it must have a solid foundation. The people rebuilt the temple’s foundation using the materials God provided. We build our lives on the Savior God has provided: Jesus Christ. When our lives are built on Jesus, we can stand firm and secure, knowing He will always be faithful no matter what we face. ”

OPTION 2: GOD PROVIDES



Prompt kids to think about the answer to the question, “How has God provided for you?” Allow kids to think about their answer for about one minute. Then, invite kids to raise their hand and give their answer. Write each kid’s answer on a dry erase board, emphasizing how much God has provided and how good He is to provide for our needs. Remind kids of how God provided for His people as they returned to Jerusalem.

Read Luke 1:68. Discuss how God provided what we need most: salvation. Tell kids that God kept His promise to send Jesus into the world to save people from their sins.

SAY “ God provided for His people in the Bible, and He provides for us today! Everything we have is a gift from God, including the forgiveness of sins. We can praise God for how He sent Jesus to save us. And we can live in ways that model His generosity. As God gives us good gifts, we can share our good gifts with others. ”

2 REFLECTION AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute a sheet of paper and pencil to each kid. Ask kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Who can I tell about this story?

Be sure to send the sheets home with the kids along with the activity pages so parents can continue to discuss the Bible story with their kids. If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page. Pray for your group.