

# THE RETURN HOME

**Bible Basis:** Ezra 1:1–7; 3:10–13; Haggai 1:2–11; Zechariah 8:2–22

**Key Verse:** They will be my people. I will be their faithful God, I will keep my promises to them.  
—Zechariah 8:8, NIV

**Bible Point:** God’s people promise to follow his ways. God wants me to follow him.

**Resource:** *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 19: “The Return Home”

## STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

**Stuff You Need:** wall

Ask the children to stand sideways against a wall and put one shoulder and one foot against the wall. Challenge them to try to lift the other foot off the floor. This is more difficult than it looks! After a few tries, explain that this action requires shifting your body’s balancing point, but the wall keeps you from doing that. Talk about:

- Tell me about something you’ve done that looked easy but turned out to be hard.
- Do you like to try new things, or do you like to stay with the old way? Explain.

Say, **In the Bible story today, we’ll see that God’s people reached a point where they had to shift their balancing point. They had to make some changes to do what God asked them to do.**

## STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

**Stuff You Need:** copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 19*, classroom props

Tell the story from *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 19. Have the children find Ezra and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

### The New Temple

Assign the children to four groups. Each group will read a passage together and decide how to dramatize it for the large group. Let them use whatever props they can find around the classroom. Allow about ten minutes for groups to plan their presentations. If you have a small class, groups can do more than one scene, or the class can dramatize all the scenes together.

Read the narration that follows, pausing as indicated for groups to present.

Scene 1: *Ezra 1:1–7*

Scene 2: *Ezra 3:10–11*

Scene 3: *Ezra 3:12–13*

Scene 4: *Ezra 6:16–18*

**God’s people were excited! After long years of living in a foreign country far away, they were going home!**

*Pause for the first group to present Scene 1, then continue the narration.*

**Forty-two thousand people made the long trip back to Jerusalem, ready to rebuild their land.**

*Pause for the second group to present Scene 2, then continue.*

**But there were some people making loud noises not because they were glad, but because they were sad!**

*Pause for the third group to present Scene 3, then continue.*

**Not everyone in Jerusalem was excited about the new temple. The people who had been living in Jerusalem during all the years while God’s people were gone didn’t want a new temple. They didn’t even want all these strange people there. They tried to cause all kinds of trouble to get rid of God’s people and stop the building project, but King Cyrus had given the order for God’s people to go back to Jerusalem, so the grumblers couldn’t really do anything about it.**

**The people had to build houses, too. Some of them got distracted with building their own houses and forgot about working on the temple. So God sent messengers named Haggai and Zechariah to remind the people what they were supposed to be doing. Haggai and Zechariah reminded the people that God loved them and wanted them to worship him in the temple. Zechariah told the people that God said, “I will save my people. I will gather them from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem. They will be my people. I will be their faithful God. I will keep my promises to them.”**

**Then the people got back to work on the temple.**

*Pause for the fourth group to present Scene 4, then wrap up.*

**Now the people would be able to worship the way God wanted them to. Now they would have a place to come and praise God together. Now they could let everyone around them know they wanted to follow God. Going back to Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple was their way of saying they were ready to follow God now.**

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 19*. Ask the children to look at the picture and tell you about rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- How did the people show they were going to follow God?
- Name some ways you can follow God.

Say, **We all make mistakes, but God welcomes us to get right back on the path of following him.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

### STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

#### OPTION 1: BIBLE VERSE QUESTIONS

**Stuff You Need:** Bible Verse Questions Activity Sheet, four buckets or baskets, small ball or beanbag

To set up the game, set the four buckets in a straight line with about a foot between each bucket. Cut apart the Bible Verse Questions from the activity sheet and put one in each bucket. Have players stand two or three feet back from the first bucket and toss the beanbag into the first bucket. If a player misses, another player takes a turn. If a player hits the first bucket, have a helper pull the Bible Verse Question out of the bucket and the player that did the tossing answers it. Then that player moves on to the next bucket. The goal is to be able to hit all four buckets in a row without missing. Whenever a player misses, someone else gets a turn. After the game, talk about:

- What does this verse tell us about what following God's ways will be like?
- Can anyone say the whole verse without missing?

Say, **Following God is something to celebrate! Let the world know that's what you want to do!**

#### OPTION 2: TEMPLE BUILDERS

**Stuff You Need:** sheets, blankets, classroom items

Say, **In today's Bible story, we learned about how the people of Israel rebuilt the temple. Use the materials to build a temple of your own. It should be big enough for our entire class.** If you have a large class, divide the children into small groups of four to eight and give each group supplies to build a temple. Allow the children to work together to build a temple. When they are finished, crawl inside as a class and spend some time worshiping God. You may want to read a passage from the Bible, spend time in prayer, or sing some of your class's favorite worship songs.

#### OPTION 3: I AM A TEMPLE OF GOD

**Stuff You Need:** I Am a Temple of God Activity Sheet

Give an activity sheet to each child. Look at the brick wall on the Activity Sheet. Say, **Brick walls are strong and solid. Our relationship with God should be as strong and solid. It is built with God's promises to us and his people and with our promises to him.** Talk with the class about the

promises that have been made throughout the Bible and about some of the promises that we make to God. Have the children fill the bricks in with some of those promises, choosing the ones that are most important to them. Have some of the children share with the class.

### **OPTION 4: WHY DO WE BELIEVE?**

**Stuff You Need:** poster board, paper, markers, decorating supplies, scissors, glue

Talk to your group about why we believe in something.

- **What influences us to be believers in a theory, a person, a faith, a cause?**
- **Are there particular things that influence, cause, or help people to believe in something? What are some of those things?**
- **Is influencing people to believe in something fair or should it be a natural occurrence?**
- **God wants us to believe in him. There is no question about it.**
- **How do we know? Does he do anything that helps us or guides us to that belief?**
- **When we have faith, when we believe, we should not hide it. It is our mission to be evangelistic and spread the news that Jesus is our Lord.**
- **How does God want us to do that? Brainstorm ideas and ways that you have already experienced.**

In small groups of 2-3 design a church. Using art supplies such as markers, crayons, poster board, construction paper, or whatever is available, have the children make their church an open place to pray. Label areas if appropriate, such as day care area, senior center, and sanctuary. Name the church. This project may take two sessions.

## **STEP 4: GOING HOME**

Pray in small groups that the children would follow God this week. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 19*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.