



LESSON 38

God brings about the restoration of the temple

EZRA 1:1-6:22



God faithfully restores His people to worship Him.



“In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing” (Ezra 1:1).

Supporting Truths

1. God keeps His word to restore His people.
2. God is in control, even over kings, to restore His people.
3. God overcomes opposition to restore His people.
4. God restores His people so that they may worship Him.

Objectives

1. Describe how God kept His word spoken through Jeremiah.
2. Name the two kings God used to restore His people and temple worship.
3. List two ways enemies tried to ruin the rebuilding of the temple.
4. Explain that the altar and temple represent worship and God’s presence. .
5. Describe how the returning Jews prioritized worship above all.

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

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Lesson Summary

God had promised that the Medes would destroy Babylon, and that He would use Cyrus to restore His people and rebuild the temple. In the first six chapters of Ezra, God accomplished His will by moving Cyrus to make a decree, giving His people a heart for worship, and working through Persian politics to complete the temple. Every effort to oppose the work failed, because God never abandons His plan to call a people to Himself in joyful worship.

Spotlight on the Gospel

The Jews' return to Jerusalem reminded them of God's power and purpose in redeeming them from Egypt. God has the same power and purpose in redeeming Christians today. From the beginning, God created mankind in His image to delight in Him and glorify Him, and that purpose will not fail. We must trust in Christ's power to save us, to display His glory through us, and to bring us one day into His perfect presence to worship Him forever.

LAST WEEK



God delivers Daniel from
the lions' den
Daniel 6:1–30

THIS WEEK



God brings about the
restoration of the
temple
Ezra 1:1–6:22

NEXT WEEK



God guides Israel to
repentance
Ezra 7:1–10:44

EXILE

RETURN

Lesson Commentary

God faithfully restores His people to worship Him.

It had been almost 70 years since Nebuchadnezzar had exiled Daniel and other upper class Jews in 605 BC. As time passed, there were always a few, like Daniel, who still loved God and cried out to Him to forgive Israel and restore Jerusalem for the sake of His name (Dan 9). They remembered Jeremiah's prophecy that the exile would end after 70 years (Jer 25:11), and they eagerly anticipated that day. God did not disappoint, for He is faithful to keep His word. Just as He promised, He would bring His people back to their land and to their God (Jer 29:10–14).

God moved Cyrus to make a decree (1:1–2:70)

God used Cyrus to keep His promise, showing that He is **sovereign, completely in control**. Cyrus honored the LORD (1:2), but only because he was a **polytheist, worshiping many different gods** to try to get them all on his side. Cyrus was treating the LORD as a tool in his hand, but in reality he was only a tool in the LORD's hand (1:1), as all rulers are (Prov 21:1). Cyrus issued his decree in 538 BC and the Jews settled Judea and rebuilt the altar in late 537 BC. From 605 BC to 537 BC was 70 years because Daniel was exiled before the new Jewish civil year began in September of 605 BC and the altar was built after the new civil year began in 537 BC. Since Hebrew dates include portions of years as whole years, this is exactly the 70 years God had predicted.

Years	ACTIVITY
605–537 BC	Land Rests for 70 Years
586–516 BC	Temple Desolate for 70 Years

God used Cyrus for His plan, but what was God's plan? Long ago, God had freed Israel from Egypt so that they would be His own people, a kingdom of priests and holy nation (Exod 19:5–6). Then, 480 years after the Exodus, Solomon built the temple as the central place where this relationship would happen (1 Kgs 6:1). At the temple God lived among His people (8:11) and His people entered His presence through prayer

and worship (8:30–53). So when God moved Cyrus to issue a decree for the people to return and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:2–4), He showed that His plan had not changed. He moved the hearts of His people—especially many priests—to restore them to Himself (1:5).

He even moved Cyrus to restore the original vessels Solomon had made for temple worship. (1:7–11). He was undoing what Nebuchadnezzar had done (2 Kgs 25:14–15), just as God said He would (Jer 27:22). So in 537 BC, Zerubbabel led 50,000 Jews, along with 8,000 animals and the holy vessels, returned and settled in Judea (Ezra 2:1, 64–65). Much later, two more groups returned (458 BC and 445 BC). These three returns from exile were a second exodus. Like the first exodus from Egypt, this return displayed God's sovereignty over world leaders and His purpose to have a people set apart to worship Him.

THINK ABOUT IT
It was God, not man, who let His people go.



God enabled temple construction to begin (3:1–13)

Even though the returned Jews were vulnerable (3:3), they put proper worship first. They gathered together in a holy assembly for the first time in 70 years (3:1). They built the altar first so that they could offer the proper sacrifices and observe the proper festivals as soon as possible (3:2–6; Lev 1:3–17; 23:24–44). Working out from the altar, they next laid the temple's foundations. Again God used Cyrus (3:7), proving again that He would not give up His plan for a people specially chosen to **worship, to trust, adore, serve, and praise Him**.

Even so, this temple was not like Solomon's temple (3:12). It was smaller and less ornate, and it also lacked God's glory residing within (Hag 2:1–4; Zech 4:9–10). But it was still a sign of God's presence with His people (Hag 2:5), and a sign of an even more glorious temple to come in the millennial kingdom (Hag 2:7; Ezek 40–48). Ultimately, Solomon's temple, the second temple, and the millennial temple all point forward to the perfect fulfillment when God and the Lamb will themselves be the temple (Rev 21:22).

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

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THINK ABOUT IT
God's people were created and redeemed to be with God, belong to Him, and worship Him forever (Rev 22:3–4).

God enabled the completion of the temple (4:1–6:18)

But there always is opposition to God's people and true worship (4:1–2). In this case, the enemies were the Samaritans. The Samaritans were born from

the intermarriage of Jews left in the land and Gentiles brought into the land after the fall of the northern tribes centuries earlier. Since they were not true worshipers of the LORD (2 Kgs 17:26–34), Israel's leaders rejected their offer in order to safeguard pure worship.

Even so, the Samaritans managed to halt work on the temple for the next 16 years (Ezra 4:24). Although Ezra 4:6–23 does not fit chronologically in Ezra 4–6, it illustrates the kind of opposition Israel faced as they tried to rebuild the temple and the city. But God's word

cannot fail. He does not reject His people or give up His plan for worship. So, urged on by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the people resumed work on the temple (5:1–2).



THINK ABOUT IT
“If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31).

Reign of Persian Kings	Years
Cyrus (Darius the Mede)	549–529 BC
Cambyses	529–522 BC
Darius I	521–485 BC
Ahasuerus (Xerxes I)	485–464 BC
Artaxerxes I	464–424 BC

Again the Jews faced opposition. Tattenai, most likely a Persian official, asked the Jews who gave them permission to build (5:3). Yet again, God was in control. Not only did He allow work to continue while Tattenai communicated with Darius (5:5), but He also worked through the politics to make things even better

(5:6–6:5). Through Darius, God prohibited anyone from interfering (6:6–7), and He caused the Jews' enemies to provide for all the costs (6:8–10). While some see only political theater and religious pragmatism at work here, God's people see God's providence, His behind-the-scenes care and control over His creation.

Blessed by God's providence and encouraged by His prophets, the people finished the temple in 516 BC, 20 years after it had begun (6:13–15). This marked 70 years from the time Solomon's temple was destroyed in 586 BC, proving once again that God's word comes true. The people realized that the actions even of the world's most powerful kings (6:15) were ultimately controlled by the LORD to accomplish His word (6:22). They also knew the appropriate response: worship. That's why the people celebrated the Passover (6:19–22), because God's purpose in restoring His people is that they may worship Him.

That is still God's purpose, for all His people. Although the returned Jews quickly abandoned God and have been apostate ever since, God will one day restore Israel permanently, for His calling is irrevocable (Rom 11:26–29). Until then, God's purpose continues in the church. Christians are united in Christ to be God's holy temple (1 Pet 2:5). Like Israel, we are God's kingdom of priests and holy nation, called to proclaim God's praises and live for His glory (2:9–12). We face opposition, but our God makes sure His word comes true. Since He controls even the most powerful rulers, nothing can stop His plan. One day, all the redeemed, Jew and Gentile, will know what true joy is when they worship God perfectly in the New Creation forever (Rev 21:1–22:5).



THINK ABOUT IT
Man's greatest achievements, viewed from the heights of heaven, are seen for what they really are—nothing.

Lesson Outline

God faithfully restores His people to worship Him.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE



1. God used Cyrus to keep His Word (1:1–2:70).
2. God's enemies tried to stop God's Word (4:1–24).
3. God kept His Word (4:1–6:18).

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE



1. God moved Cyrus to allow Jews to return home (1:1–2:70).
 - Cyrus decreed that Jews rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (1:1–4).
 - God stirred up the hearts of the Jews to return (1:5).
 - Cyrus provided the necessary supplies (1:6).
 - Cyrus returned what Nebuchadnezzar had taken (1:7–2:70).
2. God enabled temple worship to be restored (3:1–13).
 - The Jews rebuilt the altar and offered sacrifices to God (3:1–7).
 - The Jews laid the foundations and sang praise to God (3:8–13).
3. God enabled the temple to be completed (4:1–6:18).
 - The Jews guarded pure worship as they rebuilt the temple (4:1–5).
 - The Jews faced opposition to rebuilding the temple (4:6–23).
 - Darius provided for rebuilding the temple (4:24–6:13).
 - The Jews celebrated Passover after they rebuilt the temple (6:14–22).



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

- 1. What did God promise through Jeremiah?**
He promised that after 70 years in exile, Cyrus would allow Israel to return to their land.
- 2. How did God keep this promise?**
God stirred up Cyrus to issue a decree, and He stirred up the hearts of some Jews to return.
- 3. Who discouraged the Israelites from building the temple?**
The Samaritans.
- 4. How did God overcome the opposition?**
He caused Darius to make the Samaritans pay for the temple.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

- 1. What was God's original plan for Israel?**
God called them to worship Him as His kingdom of priests and holy nation.
- 2. How was Solomon's temple part of this plan?**
God chose to be present at Solomon's temple, to hear their prayers and receive their worship.
- 3. How was Israel's return under Cyrus a second exodus?**
Like the first exodus, God brought Israel back by controlling rulers, and He brought them back so that they would worship Him.
- 4. What were the 70 years of exile?**
The land rested for 70 years from 605 to 537 BC. The temple was destroyed from 586 to 516 BC.
- 5. How did the people prioritize worship?**
The first thing they did was build the altar to offer the proper sacrifices.
- 6. Why did some men weep after the temple foundation was laid?**
They saw that the new temple did not come close to the glory of Solomon's temple.
- 7. How did God display His sovereign power in the Jews' return and rebuilding of the temple?**
God used three of the world's most powerful rulers to fulfill His word.
- 8. How does Israel's return and new temple encourage us today?**
It shows us that we can trust God to make us His special people to worship Him forever.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE PACKED?

Today's lesson begins by describing how Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. For the Jews, moving from Babylon to Jerusalem would have required much faith and hope in God. Help the children to create a packing list, talking about the things that the Jews might have packed for their trip from Babylon to Jerusalem.

WHO RETURNED TO JERUSALEM?

Ezra 2 is a testimony to God's faithfulness in bringing the Jews back to Jerusalem. Before class, create a scroll with Ezra 2:1 written at the top. As each child enters the classroom, have a teacher or helper read the verse to him and write his name on the scroll. (You could have someone come in and write the children's names in calligraphy; the more beautiful the scroll, the more the children will appreciate the activity.) Once class begins, read the entire scroll, and tell the children to imagine what it would have been like to be one of the Jews returning to Jerusalem. In today's lesson they will learn about how God graciously allowed a list like this to be recorded in His Word.



BUILDING THE TEMPLE

Give the children building blocks, and instruct them to help you build the temple foundation. Pretend to use gold or silver you brought from Babylon to pay lumber men for wood. Measure the blocks with a ruler, and talk about what kind of building it should be.

ACT IT OUT (EZRA 3:10–13)

Select a few children to stand to one side of you, and give them kazoos. These children represent the priests (3:10). Then select a few children to stand on your other side, and give them cymbals or tambourines. These children represent the sons of Asaph (3:10). Divide the rest of the children into two groups. One group should say, "For He is good," and the other, "For His mercy endures forever toward Israel" (3:11). The children can practice their parts a few times and then end with a great shout of "Praise the Lord!" while the "priests" and "sons of Asaph" make music with their instruments. Do not be surprised if this sounds chaotic; the people in Jerusalem could not tell the shouts of joy from the sounds of weeping (3:13). After the activity, explain why some Jews wept while others rejoiced.



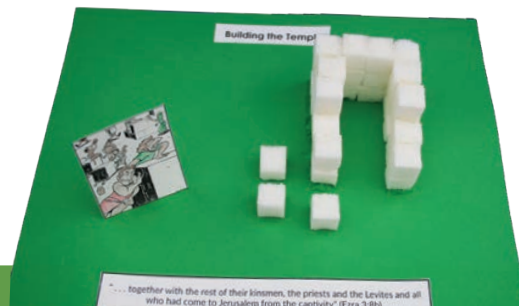
BUILDING THE TEMPLE

See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Craft sheet, sugar cubes, cardstock, glue, scissors, and crayons.

Directions: Before class, build a temple of your own to determine how many sugar cubes each student will need. You can then bring your temple in as an example for the students to copy. Pre-cut picture and verse from the craft sheet. Have the students color picture. Glue the picture and the verse to the cardstock. Then they can build their temples with sugar cubes. Be sure to allow time for the glue to dry.

Building the Temple
See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

CAMPING TRIP

Bring in various items used on a camping trip. Talk about how these things help us survive when living out in the wilderness away from our homes. In today's lesson, the Israelites will go on a long camping trip. Tell the children to listen closely to discover what the Israelites will see.

FAIR TRADE?

Give each child a small treat. Then tell them that they have a choice: they can keep what they have, or they can trade it for what you have. (Do not show them what you have.) If they decide to trade, they must do it now, not once they see what it is that you have. Have the children who want to trade stand up. Then give them what you have: twice the amount of whatever they were given at first. Ask the class why they did or didn't trade. Tell them that Israel did not want to give up their good life in favor of an unknown future. In today's lesson we will learn that Israel had to trust God for the unknown.



ILLUSTRATE

GOD DOES NOT CHANGE

Put some small prizes or treats in a bag. Show the children the closed bag, and have the children vote on what they think might be in the bag (you may provide a few options). Does the outcome of the vote have any effect on what we will find when we open the bag? No. God has told us things about Himself in His Word, and He has made many promises, too. One promise that He made was to bring the Israelite captives back to Jerusalem. There were not very many people who believed this promise, but what people thought did not change God's plan at all.

GOD REMEMBERS

Tell the children that you need help remembering something. Do different things to help yourself remember: tie a string to your finger, set a timer or alarm on your phone, ask the children for help, etc. Ask the children if any of them have trouble remembering things (coats, books, homework, household chores, etc.) Then ask the class if God has trouble remembering. He does not. Today's lesson is a great example of God's faithfulness to do exactly what He said He will do.



APPLY

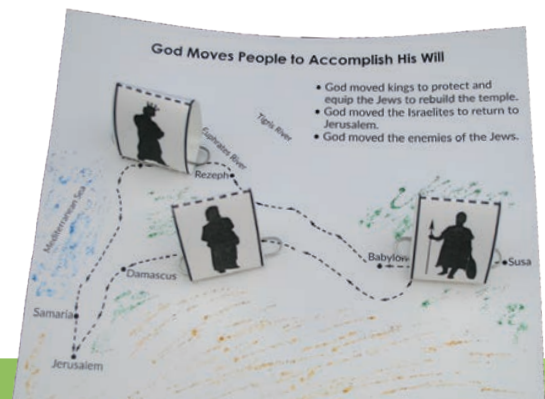
GOD MOVES PEOPLE TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL

See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Craft sheets, paper clips, magnets, scissors, and glitter glue or crayons.

Directions: Have students cut out the character tabs from the craft sheet. The students then should fold along the dotted lines and use paper clips to hold the ends together so that each character can stand. Use glitter glue or crayons to decorate the map. Have the students set the characters on the map and use magnets to move the pieces along the dotted line.

God Moves People to Accomplish His Will
See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2



AGES 9–11



INTRODUCE

RECORD OF FAITHFULNESS

Bring to class a Guinness Book of World Records or almanac. Read a few noteworthy events that have taken place in the last couple of years. Then ask the children to tell you what will happen in the future: Who will win the Superbowl? What will the temperature be in Los Angeles, California on October 21st? Nobody knows; but God does. Read Isaiah 46:9–10 and explain that God, unlike the false gods of the nations, is able to reveal from ancient times “things that are not yet done.” Explain that the Jews’ return and rebuilding of the temple was the fulfillment of a 70-year-old promise.

WHAT HE SAYS, HE WILL DO

What God says, He will do. He doesn’t break His promises, and He always has the resources that He needs. As a class, make a list of things in Scripture that God promised to do and accomplished: flood (Gen 7), birth of Isaac (Gen 21), exodus from Egypt (Exod 3, 6, 12), manna from heaven (Exod 16), Jesus’ virgin birth (Isa 7; Matt 1), etc. What are examples of things that God promised that He would do for believers? (Examples: save them, give them peace and joy, etc.).



ILLUSTRATE

PRAISE HIM FOR HIS PROVIDENCE

When we are confused when certain things don’t make sense to us, it is easy to become discouraged. But we can trust God’s providence in the situation; He has a purpose for every situation in our lives. Share with the children a personal illustration of God’s providence from your life or from the life of your family. Explain how God used this situation to glorify Himself.

NOT LIKE THE FIRST

Many times sequels fail to live up to the original. This is especially true with movies. Ask the children if they have ever been excited about seeing a sequel to a movie, only to be disappointed with it. This is how many of the older Jews felt after the foundation of the second temple was laid (Ezra 3:10–13). Having seen the splendor of Solomon’s temple, many of the older men knew the second temple failed to match the greatness of the original temple.



APPLY

WHAT CAN I DO?

The book of Ezra says that God was served and worshiped in the temple by the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants. What were some of the jobs of service to God that these people did? In the body of Christ, we each have a job to do, too. God has given every believer gifts and abilities to do a particular job. Ask the children to name some jobs they can do in service to God now, as well as some jobs they will be able to do as adults.