

REBUILD

Date: 10.27.24 | Title: Rebuilding the Temple | Scripture: Ezra 2-6

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING

Middle School Students

The Bible is God's message about Himself and His salvation plan through Jesus.
God deserves respect, obedience, and honor.
God wants us to live for His glory.
God sent Jesus to be the atonement for our sins.
Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecies and promises.

High School Students

The Bible is God's message about Himself and His salvation plan through Jesus.
God deserves respect, obedience, and honor.
God wants us to live for His glory.
God is a righteous judge.
God sent Jesus to be the atonement for our sins.
Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecies and promises.
Jesus gave His life for us on the cross and He is the only way for salvation.



MEMORY
VERSE

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." Lamentations 3:22-24

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BACKGROUND INFO FOR LEADERS

Over the next two weeks we will be studying Ezra and Nehemiah—two books, probably originally written as one, which tell the same story. Scribes may have had difficulty fitting the material on one scroll therefore splitting the material into two halves. This same thing happened with Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe how the exiles return to the Promised Land and struggle to rebuild Jerusalem, the temple, and their society. Ezra focuses on rebuilding the temple and reconstituting the people of God, getting the system for properly worshipping God up and running. Later, Nehemiah focuses on rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem.

Because of Judah's disobedience and refusal to repent, the judgment detailed in Deuteronomy 28 becomes reality. God's people live in exile for 70 years separated from the presence of God and the Promised Land. The book of Ezra begins with Cyrus's decree that the Jews could return to Jerusalem. The first wave starts immediately. Led by a man named Zerubbabel, the grandson of King Jehoiachin, this group returns to Jerusalem and begins to rebuild the destroyed temple. Economic and political problems caused delays with the project. The temple was finally finished around 515 BC, and Ezra arrived in Jerusalem to teach the law of God to the people in 458 BC. During the gap between the temple's completion and Ezra's arrival, the events of the book of Esther were taking place in Persia (modern day Iran).

The Jews return to Jerusalem began with Cyrus, the king of Persia, who had overthrown the Babylonians and the Assyrians and ruled the known world at that time. When Cyrus conquered a kingdom rather than keep the people as slaves in Persia, he sent them home to govern their land under his ultimate authority. In 539 BC, he gave that command to people from Israel and Judah. By God's leading and in fulfillment of a prophecy by Jeremiah, Cyrus, the ruler of the world, said that God had commanded him to send the Jewish people back to Jerusalem to build a new temple (Ezra 1:1). He not only invited the Jews to return to their homeland, he encouraged their neighbors to support their efforts with silver and gold and livestock, plus offerings for the temple when it was rebuilt. He also returned the temple furniture and worship articles, which Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had removed when he attacked Jerusalem before the captivity (1:3-4).

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Ezra tallied up a total of 49,897 people who returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:64-65). Many more stayed behind, comfortable with their situation in Babylon. Before the captivity, God had told the children of Israel to settle in and make the best of their captivity (Jeremiah 29:5-7). Some of them became a little too settled. Fifty thousand returned to Jerusalem, but a million stayed behind. In Jesus's time, five million Jews still lived outside of Israel, so going back to Ezras day, only a small percentage returned.

Of those who returned, a good ten percent were from the tribe of Levi-the priests and those dedicated to God's work in the temple-along with non-Jewish people who served in non-priestly roles in the temple. Because of the diaspora-the dispersal of Jews-that began with Assyria and the ten northern tribes of Israel and continued with Babylon's conquest of the remaining two tribes in Judah, it was sometimes hard to verify who was from which tribe. This was particularly important when it came to the Levites, who were the only ones God allowed to serve as priests. Ezra made a list so he could tell who was a Levite and fit to serve as a priest.

Even before the foundation of the temple was laid, Zerubbabel and the priest Jeshua built the altar and were keeping the prescribed feasts and making daily burnt offerings (Ezra 3). The first thing on their agenda was to get a center of worship up and running, and the center of their worship was sacrifices. The Jews celebrated what God had done for them by keeping the feasts and offering regular sacrifices.

At the laying of the foundation, most people were shouting God's praises and signing responsively— one group singing "For He is good" and another responding "For His mercy endures forever toward Israel" (Ezra 3:11). Some of the older priests and tribal heads wept loudly, perhaps still living in the past. They thought that the new temple wasn't as spectacular as Solomon's temple. Even with Cyrus support, the second temple was not nearly as large or grand as Solomon's, but the size of a temple or an offering are nothing compared to a heart dedicated to God's worship and service. Most of the returnees rejoiced with full hearts. God had promised that this day would come— that after seventy years' captivity, Babylon would fall (Jeremiah 25:11-12) and Israel would return (Jeremiah 29:10). There was cause for celebration because they were moving forward. God's work in their lives wasn't finished and that's what is so wonderful about God: He has done great things, but He is also doing great things now, and He will do great things in the future too. The rebuilt temple brought the light of God's blessing back to Jerusalem.

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By the spring of 535 BC, the temple foundation was laid. A group, alternately called “the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin” (Ezra 4:1) and “the people of the land” (v. 4), lobbied to stop the work on the temple. They had come to Zerubbabel and Jeshua and asked to help build the temple but had been turned away. They claimed they had worshipped God since the days of Assyria— the empire that had conquered and dispersed the ten northern tribes of Israel. Assyria’s policy had been to send in foreign people to marry the remaining Jews, muddying their religion with pagan practices. By Jesus’s day, this mixed group would be known as the Samaritans; they had their own system of worship and their own temple, where they worshipped their own version of the one true God.

After suffering years of captivity in a foreign land for their nation’s disobedience of God, Zerubbabel and his leaders wouldn’t have anything to do with this intermingling and these adversaries took it personally: They “tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building” (v. 4), bribing officials to slow the work down and writing letters to the Persian king in protest. Cyrus, who had let the Jews return to Israel, was now dead, and the favor God had given the Jews with him was also gone.

Persia’s current leader was Artaxerxes, and the distractors in Jerusalem wrote to him, telling him that the Jews had a history of rebelling against any foreign power occupying their land. They painted themselves as good citizens of the Persian Empire, unwilling to see Artaxerxes’s honor dismantled by these rebellious Jews— even though they had been willing to help build the temple. Word came from Persia to stop the project, under penalty of military action, and work on the temple stopped until the next guy, Darius, was in charge in Persia (vv. 18-24).

For sixteen years, the work stopped. No one lifted a tool or moved a stone on the temple site. People didn’t want to risk Persia’s wrath; they lost momentum and grew discouraged with the rubble from the captivity laying in heaps all around them. God sent two prophets to snap them back to attention and get them back to building - Haggai and Zechariah.

Haggai preached four sermons to Zerubbabel and Jeshua, and Zechariah rebuked the people for building up their own homes and leaving the house of God in ruins. The two leaders responded to the prophets urging and got back to work on the temple (Ezra 5:2).

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BACKGROUND INFO FOR LEADERS

The preaching of God’s Word inspired the people to go through with the work. Full trust in God to keep His promises, to be faithful to His character, means knowing that He will always do the right thing even when you don’t know what the path ahead looks like. Haggai and Zechariah reminded the people of that, and they were then able to face their foes with their confidence fully placed in God.

The locals who had been giving them a hard time came and grumbled again, threatening to appeal to the king. Zerubbabel and Jeshua told them, “Write to Darius if you must, but we are God’s servants and we are going to finish the mission that King Cyrus sent us to complete. Check your records and see.” Sure enough, when Darius went back to the scrolls, he found the decree of Cyrus, which included mention of his financial support for the whole undertaking (Ezra 6:1-5).

Darius wrote to the troublemakers, telling them, “Back off and let the Jews work. Furthermore, use the taxes from your lands to fund their work, giving them whatever they need to make sacrifices to God.” Zerubbabel and Jeshua didn’t defend them-selves— they left it to God and He came through. They finished the temple a few years later and dedicated it with a big celebration.

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LOCATE THE SCRIPTURE & TELL THE STORY



TELL
THE
STORY



Tell the story: Use the Background Info for Leaders and the summary below to help tell today's story.

God's people disobeyed God and worshipped idols. God judged their sin and sent them into exile. God promised that after 70 years, He would set them free. Just like God promised, His people went home to Jerusalem after 70 years in exile. The city of Jerusalem was in ruins. God sent prophets like Zechariah to encourage God's people and give the hope while they rebuilt the temple.

Zerubbabel and the high priest led a group of God's people back to Judah to rebuild the Lord's temple in Jerusalem. First, the priests rebuilt the altar. They gave burnt offerings to God and celebrated. Then they laid the foundation of the temple. When the foundation was finished, the priests put on special clothes and the people praised God. They sang, "The Lord is good, His faithful love will last forever."

Not everyone was happy though. Some of the older people remembered what the temple had looked like before it had been destroyed. They cried and shouted loudly. Sometimes other people interrupted the rebuilding of the temple by making the people of Judah discouraged or afraid. At one point, the building of the temple stopped for a while. God sent prophets to encourage the people and they started working again.

At this time, Darius, the king of Persia, ruled over the land of Judah. The king was in charge of a lot of land, so he put governors in charge of some of the land. A governor named Tattenai noticed what God's people were doing. Tattenai asked the workers, "DO you have permission to rebuild this temple?" The workers said, "We do." Still, Tattenai sent a report to the king about what God's people were doing. "They said King Cyrus gave them permission to rebuild the temple," Tattenai wrote. "Please search the royal records to see if this is true."



Read directly from Scripture, use the message, or the summary provided in the lesson



Put the events in order, draw a comic strip, build it with blocks or playdough, act it out, etc...

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King Darius's officials searched the royal records for Cyrus's order. They found it—a scroll with a record from King Cyrus. This is what was written on the scroll: “Let God's temple be rebuilt. It will be a place to offer sacrifices. Let its foundation be rebuilt.” King Cyrus had also ordered for the cost of building the temple to be paid for out of the royal treasury.

So King Darius sent a letter back to Tattenai. He gave this order: “Stay away from the workers in Jerusalem. Don't bother them or try to stop them. Give them whatever they need.”

Tattenai obeyed the king's order. The Jewish leaders kept building, and they finally finished the temple of God! The people celebrated and made offerings to God. They chose priests and assistants to serve in the temple. Then God's people celebrated the Passover. God's people were so happy. Now the temple of God was finally complete.

Re-tell the Bible Story: Have students re-tell the story as best they can.

Attributes of God: Determine the characteristics of God that we see in today's story. How can knowing these characteristics of God to be true, change the way we live in Christ?

Share the GOSPEL:

God's people rebuilt the temple so they would have a place to worship God. Years later, God sent His Son, Jesus, to be with His people. Now, God does not dwell with His people through the temple. Instead, God dwells directly with His people through His Spirit. Jesus provided something better than the temple; He gives us Himself.

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“Storying” Questions: As you ask these questions, have your students find the answers in the actual verses of scripture instead of recalling them from your re-telling of the story. We always want to encourage all of our students to go directly to God’s Word over a commentary on or summary of scripture. Use the Bible Study Bookmark Questions as well as these questions to help students understand the text:

1. What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
2. What does this story teach me about myself?
3. Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God’s glory and my good?
4. Are there promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
5. How does this story help me live on mission better?
6. How are the books of Ezra and Nehemiah alike and different?
7. How long were God’s people in exile? Why were they there?
8. Who led the people back to their land?
9. What do they attempt to do when they return? What does this tell us about their hearts?
10. Describe some of the oppositions they face?
11. How do the Persian leaders fare when they go against God and His plan for His people?
12. How do you know we can we trust God in all circumstances?
13. How can we show others that we trust God?
14. Can you remember any times where it was difficult to trust God?
15. What are some practical ways we can choose to continually put our faith in Christ when it is difficult? (read your Bible and pray- even when you don’t want to or feel like it’s pointless, remind yourself of God’s faithfulness through Bible stories you know, remind yourself of God’s faithfulness in the lives of those around you, remind yourself of God’s faithfulness in your own life, memorize scripture)
16. Why is Jesus a better gift than a temple? The temple was a temporary reminder of God’s presence with His people. God sent Jesus so we have forever forgiveness and eternal life with the presence of the Holy Spirit.
17. When those around the Jews tried to discourage them or stop them from following God and building the temple they had an important choice to make- they followed God’s plan and finished the temple. How can we respond when others might tempt us to disobey God?

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ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

ATTENTIVE - God hears and responds to the needs of his children.

COMPASSIONATE - God cares for his children and acts on their behalf.

CREATOR - God made everything. He is uncreated.

DELIVERER - God rescues and saves his children.

ETERNAL - God is not limited by time. He exists outside of time.

FAITHFUL - God always keeps his promises.

GENEROUS - God gives what is best and beyond what is deserved.

GLORIOUS - God displays His greatness and worth.

GOOD - God is what is best and gives what is best. He is incapable of doing harm.

HOLY - God is perfect, pure, and without sin.

IMMUTABLE/UNCHANGING - God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE - God is beyond our understanding. We can comprehend Him in part but not in whole.

INFINITE - God has not limits in His person or on His power.

JEALOUS - God will not share his glory with another. all glory rightfully belongs to him.

JUST - god is fair in all his actions and judgements. He cannot over-punish or under-punish.

LOVING - God feels and displays infinite, unconditional affection toward his children. His love for them does not depend on their worth, response, or merit.

MERCIFUL - God does not give his children the punishment they deserve.

OMNIPOTENT/ALMIGHTY - God holds all power. nothing is too hard for God. What He wills He can accomplish.

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ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

OMNIPRESENT - God is fully present everywhere.

OMNISCIENT - God knows everything, past, present, and future - all potential and real outcomes, all things micro and macro.

PATIENT/LONG-SUFFERING - God is untiring and bears with His children.

PROVIDER - God meets the needs of his children.

REFUGE - God is a place of safety and protection for his children.

RIGHTEOUS - God is always good and right.

SELF-EXISTENT - God depends on nothing and no one to give him life or existence.

SELF-SUFFICIENT - God is not vulnerable. He has no needs.

SOVEREIGN - God does everything according to His plan and pleasure.

TRANSCENDENT - God is not like humans. He is infinitely higher in being and action.

TRUTHFUL - Whatever God speaks or does is truth and reality.

WISE - God knows what is best and acts accordingly. He cannot choose wrongly.

WORTHY - God deserves all glory and honor and praise.

WRATHFUL - God hates all unrighteousness.

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PRAYER PROMPTS

God, thank You for setting Your plans in motion before we even knew we needed it. Thank You that we can always trust You. Help us trust You more and tell others about You!

IF TIME ALLOWS:

Help the students in your group practice memorizing the books of the Bible:

- Torah: Genesis-Deuteronomy
- History: Joshua-Esther
- Poetry: Job-Song of Solomon
- Major Prophets: Isaiah-Daniel
- Minor Prophets: Hosea-Malachi
- Gospels: Matthew-John
- Paul's Letters: Romans-Philemon
- General Letters: Hebrews-Revelation

MISSIONS EMPHASIS:

For the months of September and October we will be collecting money for the Connie Maxwell Children's Home. Please visit their website for pictures and descriptions of some of the services they offer that you can share with your group. A generous donor will match all of our donations. Encourage your class to collect money and donate it in the giving funnel in the upstairs lobby. Students can donate with their families as they arrive, or you can go together as a class on the way back to the Worship Center at the end of SS.

REVIEW UNIT VERSE:

Work on memorizing this weeks verse with the students in your group. You can use the first letter of each word in the verse to help with this. For example, the unit verse would look like this:

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Application Questions

LOOK UPWARD



- How does this story apply to your relationship with God?
- What does it teach you about Him- His will and His heart?
- What aspect of His character is He inviting you to experience and enjoy?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story in your relationship with God?
- What practical steps can you take to live out these truths in your relationship with God?

LOOK INWARD



- How does this story apply to your heart and your own spiritual growth?
- What does it teach you about yourself, your needs, or your goals in life?
- In what aspects of your personal life is God inviting you to grow and mature?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story inwardly?
- How will those around you benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to allow these truths to help you grow spiritually?

LOOK AROUND



- How does this story apply to your relationship with others?
- What does it teach you about how to see others and relate to them?
- What is god inviting you to do differently in your relationships?

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Application Questions

LOOK OUTWARD

- How does this story apply to your ministry and mission in life- to your role in God's kingdom, in society, and in the world?
- What does it teach you about God's purposes for the world?
- What part of His mission is He inviting you to participate in?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story in your ministry?
- How will the world benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to live out these truths in the world?

LOOK FORWARD

- How does this story apply to your future, both in this age and in eternity?
- What does it teach you about God's plan for your life, now and forever?
- What aspects of eternity is God inviting you to participate in?
- How will you benefit in the future by applying these truths now?
- How will God's kingdom benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to impact eternity now with these truths?