

# The Temple Rebuilt

(Ezra)

## Pre-Session Warm Up

Have you ever been in a situation where you wanted to please God by doing right, but you knew that others wouldn't want to go along with you? [Teacher, let the children share. Be prepared with examples—participating in questionable activities at slumber parties, vandalizing property, shoplifting, copying homework, and so on.]

God wants you to please Him no matter what your friends may say or do. He will give you the power to be true and faithful to Him.

## Opening Prayer

Father, teach us how to handle the spiritual warfare that comes against us at times when we want to do right. Give us confidence in Your Holy Spirit power Who will help us remain faithful and true to You no matter what other people say or do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## Memory Verse

*Do not grow weary in doing good. (2 Thessalonians 3:13)*

## Lesson

We have learned that over and over again, because of their unfaithfulness, God had to discipline His chosen people. This time, He allowed the Babylonians to conquer Israel and enslave His people!

When the Babylonians came in, they looted the Temple of all the gold and silver things, and then they burned Jerusalem and broke down the walls, and led the people off 900 miles to present day Iraq where they became slaves to King Nebuchadnezzar.

Recently, we have had lessons from the book of Esther. While the people were still in captivity, God raised up Esther, a poor orphan girl, to become the Queen of Persia. God miraculously enabled her to save her people, the Jews, from being wiped off the face of the earth.

Turn with me now to the book of Ezra. This book tells the story of how the children of Israel finally return to the land after 70 years of captivity and slavery.

Although God punished the people for their sin, He never stopped loving them. God had promised that He would never leave them nor forsake them. And you and I have the same promise from God! Even if you are naughty and have to be disciplined, you can be sure that God will always take you back into His arms if you come to Him and confess your sin to Him.

Ezra 1:1

*In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, the LORD fulfilled the prophecy he had given through Jeremiah. He stirred the heart of Cyrus to put this proclamation in writing and to send it throughout his kingdom:*

Cyrus made a public statement.

Ezra 1:2

*"This is what King Cyrus of Persia says: "The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build him a Temple at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.*

It is amazing that this king of Persia, who wasn't even a Jew, realized that God was giving him the responsibility of building Him a Temple in Jerusalem in the land of Israel, 900 miles away!!

Then God gave a great desire to the leaders of the Israelites to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple.

Ezra 1:7

*King Cyrus himself brought out the articles that King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the LORD's Temple in Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his own gods.*

King Cyrus himself returned the gold bowls and other valuable items which King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple at Jerusalem. They were probably worth millions of dollars!

Not all the Jews returned to Israel, but those that did went to work on rebuilding the Temple because they were so thankful to God for letting them return to their home land.

## Ezra 3:10

*When the builders completed the foundation of the LORD's Temple, the priests put on their robes and took their places to blow their trumpets. And the Levites, descendants of Asaph, clashed their cymbals to praise the LORD, just as King David had prescribed.*

## Ezra 3:11

*With praise and thanks, they sang this song to the LORD: "He is so good! His faithful love for Israel endures forever!" Then all the people gave a great shout, praising the LORD because the foundation of the LORD's Temple had been laid.*

Can you picture the joy? The priests put on all their special clothes and they worshipped the Lord with trumpets and tambourines. They sang praise songs and gave all the honor and glory to the Lord!

But the work of the Lord did not go without opposition from the enemy. Any time someone tries to do something great for God, watch out! There will be resistance and hostility from those who don't love God.

If you serve God in any way, whether you are cleaning the church or teaching Sunday school or taking a meal to someone who is sick, you can bet something will happen to try to discourage you. Satan hates God and is constantly trying to trip up God's people. But God has given us the power of the Holy Spirit to please Him no matter what other people say or do.

## Ezra 4:4-5

*Then the local residents tried to discourage and frighten the people of Judah to keep them from their work. (5) They bribed agents to work against them and to frustrate their plans. This went on during the entire reign of King Cyrus of Persia and lasted until King Darius of Persia took the throne.*

There were people who had been living in the land of Israel while God's people were away in captivity in Babylon those 70 years. These people didn't appreciate the fact that the Israelites were back! So, they sent a letter to the king of Persia. Here's part of one of the letters they sent.

## Ezra 4:12-13

*"The king should know that the Jews who came here to Jerusalem from Babylon are rebuilding this rebellious and evil city. They have already laid the foundation and will soon finish its walls. (13) And the king should know that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, it will be much to your disadvantage, for the Jews will then refuse to pay their tribute, customs, and tolls to you.*

They were threatening the king, saying that if he allowed the Jews to rebuild their city, they would not pay taxes and the Persian Empire would suffer financially.

But God had this situation under His control, just as He always does!

## Ezra 5:5

*But because their God was watching over them, the leaders of the Jews were not prevented from building until a report was sent to Darius and he returned his decision.*

The Lord was overseeing the entire situation. They kept building while they waited for King Darius to issue an announcement. And, here's what he said:

## Ezra 6:3-5

*"In the first year of King Cyrus's reign, a decree was sent out concerning the Temple of God at Jerusalem. "Let the Temple be rebuilt on the site where Jews used to offer their sacrifices, using the original foundations. Its height will be ninety feet, and its width will be ninety feet. (4) Every three layers of specially prepared stones will be topped by a layer of timber. All expenses will be paid by the royal treasury. (5) Furthermore, the gold and silver cups, which were taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar from the Temple of God in Jerusalem, must be returned to Jerusalem and put back where they belong. Let them be taken back to the Temple of God."*

Darius reminded the people that King Cyrus of Persia issued the command in the first place to rebuild the Temple. He goes on...

## Ezra 6:7-9

*Do not disturb the construction of the Temple of God. Let it be rebuilt on its original site, and do not hinder the governor of Judah and the elders of the Jews in their work. (8) "Moreover, I hereby decree that you are to help these elders of the Jews as they rebuild this Temple of God. You must pay the full construction costs, without delay, from my taxes collected in the province west of the Euphrates River so that the work will not be interrupted. (9) "Give the priests in Jerusalem whatever is needed in the way of young bulls, rams, and male lambs for the burnt offerings presented to the God of heaven. And without fail, provide them with as much wheat, salt, wine, and olive oil as they need each day.*

Darius told them to continue the work and that all expenses would be paid for out of the taxes he collected from the Persians! He said the Jews were to be given whatever they needed, under penalty of death.

## Ezra 6:11-12

*"Those who violate this decree in any way will have a beam pulled from their house. Then they will be lifted up and impaled on it, and their house will be reduced to a pile of rubble. (12) May the God who has chosen the city of Jerusalem as the place to honor his name destroy any king or nation that violates this command and destroys this Temple. "I, Darius, have issued this decree. Let it be obeyed with all diligence."*

So, the Jews continued their building project. And God protected them. Finally, the Temple was finished and there was great rejoicing among the people.

## Ezra 6:16

*The Temple of God was then dedicated with great joy by the people of Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the people who had returned from exile.*

It was about this time that Ezra came to Jerusalem from Babylon. Ezra is the one that wrote this book. He was a pastor; now that the Temple was rebuilt, he wanted to rebuild the hearts of the people. They needed a pastor to teach them the ways of the Lord.

## Ezra 7:10

*This was because Ezra had determined to study and obey the Law of the LORD and to teach those decrees and regulations to the people of Israel.*

Then, King Artaxerxes, who was now the king of Persia, made a proclamation. [Teacher, Artaxerxes was Esther's step-son, the son of King Xerxes.]

## Ezra 7:24

*I also decree that no priest, Levite, singer, gatekeeper, Temple servant, or other worker in this Temple of God will be required to pay tribute, customs, or tolls of any kind.'*

Remember, the enemies of the Jews wrote a letter to the king of Persia saying, if he let the people rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, the people would not pay taxes and the Persian Empire would suffer financially? Now God prompted the king of Persia to make a law that says no temple worker shall ever have to pay taxes. Isn't God good?

When God wants to get something done, nothing can stand in His way! Sometimes when you're doing something for God, someone might come along that doesn't love God and may try to discourage you. For example, say someone asked to copy your homework and you told them that it is not honest and that God would not approve. That person might tease you or make fun of you. But you have God's Holy Spirit within you to give you power to do things God's way in spite of disapproval from those who don't love God. God honored His people by enabling them to complete the Temple.

## Closing Prayer

Thank You, Father, for always giving us the power to stay true and faithful to You no matter what other people may say or do. Help us to choose friends that want to honor You with their lives. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

## Learning Activities

### Craft Corner

#### *Church Worker Appreciation*

Ezra spent his whole life working in service to God. In our church we have people who serve God, too. Who are some of the workers in our church? [Teacher, let the children brainstorm and write the names and jobs on the board.] Since these people all work so hard to serve God, why don't we show them our appreciation?

Let's each pick a different church worker and write a Thank You note to that person as a way to encourage them in their ministry.

Have colorful paper, ribbons, sequins, and other decorating items for the children to use in making their Thank You cards.

### Game Center

Use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. Why did the children of Israel end up over in Babylon? (They had not followed the ways of the Lord; they had been unfaithful.)
2. What is the book of Ezra about? (The story of how the children of Israel finally return to the land after their captivity in Babylon and rebuild the Temple.)
3. Why was it that the king of Persia, who wasn't even a Jew, made a law that commanded the Jews to return to their land and rebuild the Temple? (God moved the heart of King Cyrus.)
4. What happened to all the valuable articles of gold and silver? (King Cyrus returned them to the children of Israel.)
5. What happened to spoil their fun after they laid the foundation of the Temple? (The enemies of God came along and tried to discourage the building project.)

6. What did the enemies of God do to try to get the work to stop? (They sent letters to the king of Persia saying that if they rebuilt the city of Jerusalem, they wouldn't pay taxes.)
7. How did God see to it that the work on the Temple was not stopped? (He prompted the king to issue a command to continue the work and that he would pay for it out of the taxes he collected from the Persians.)
8. Who was Ezra? (He was a pastor and had a heart to study the scriptures and to teach the people the ways of the Lord.)
9. How did it happen that the temple workers were ordered not to pay taxes? (The Lord prompted King Darius to issue a command that said the temple workers were not to have to pay taxes.)
10. How do some people try to stop the will of God? (If you try to do right, they'll come along and tease you or mock you and make fun of you.)
11. How does God make His will happen? (By the power of the Holy Spirit He can change the heart of anyone.)