

The Temple Rebuilt

(Ezra)

Introduction

We have been learning about the time when the people of Israel were in captivity. [Teacher, review why the Israelites were in captivity...]

Over and over again, because of their unfaithfulness, God had to discipline His chosen people. Finally, He allowed King Nebuchadnezzar to conquer Israel and take the people into captivity!

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

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.

Today we will learn from book of Ezra about how the people of Israel finally return to the land after 70 years of captivity and slavery. The book covers about 100 years and the reign of 3 kings: Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes.

Opening Prayer

Father, teach us how to handle the spiritual warfare that comes against us when we set about doing Your will. 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

*Don't fret because of evildoers ... For evil people have no future...
(Proverbs 24:19a, 20a NLT)*

Lesson

Our lesson this morning starts with King Cyrus making 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!!

Cyrus told the Jews that anyone who wanted to go back to Jerusalem, could go. And, he let the people take the valuable items which King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple at Jerusalem when he went in and demolished the Temple and led the people to Babylon. They were probably worth millions of dollars!

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.

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.

When the builders completed the foundation of the Temple, the priests put on their robes, blew their trumpets, clashed their cymbals, and praised the Lord!

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 people 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.

Ezra 4:4

Then the local residents tried to discourage and frighten the people of Judah to keep them from their work.

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! And, they did everything they could to stop the work of rebuilding the Temple. They even sent a letter to the new king of Persia, King Darius.

Here's part of one of the letters they sent to King Darius:

Ezra 4:12-13 [Teacher, read....]

"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 telling King Darius 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 Jews were allowed to keep working on the Temple until they heard back from King Darius.

And, here's what Darius 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 (who reigned before him) had already issued the command 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 collects! He said the Jews were to be given whatever they needed, under penalty of death.

Ezra 6:11

"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.

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

Now a new king, King Artaxerxes, was the king of Persian. (He was Esther's step-son.) And, about this time, Ezra came to Jerusalem from captivity.

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 made a proclamation.

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 that 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! God honored His people by enabling them to complete the Temple.

And, if you know that God wants you to accomplish something, He will give you everything you need to complete the job. Just stay true and faithful to God no matter what other people may say or do. He will give you the power of the Holy Spirit to do His will.

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. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

Return from Exile Floor Game

The students will learn the story as they move through a life-size game board.

Materials List

- One large game dice
- Life-size game board (use construction paper as the "spaces")
- Game cards for each type of space on the game board – see below.
- Map of the Middle East.
- Several large garbage bags filled with crumpled up newspaper. (I used pillows from my bed!)
- A small pile of building blocks (or large Legos).
- Pictures of the ancient city of Jerusalem (to be torn up).

Play the Game

- Divide the children into two teams. If you have a large class, have the children pair up with someone on their team. To avoid congestion on the game board, start one team from one end of the path and the other team from the other end (they will have to pass in the middle) the first team who has a player that reaches the other end wins.
- Have a player from each team roll a die to see who goes first.
- Each child rolls one die to determine how many spaces to move forward.

- If a child lands on a Question Mark space, he must answer the question correctly, then move according to the instructions on the card. Play goes to the next player.
- If a child lands on the Cross or Exclamation Point space, he must perform the action on the card then move forward or backward according the instructions on the card. (If they have to leave this square to do an activity, have them keep track of the space that they were on.) Play goes to the next player.
- Players can ask for help in answering questions.

Return from Exile Game Cards

Question Mark Cards:

1. This story is found in which Testament of the Bible, Old or New? (Answer correctly and move ahead one space.)
2. Which book of the Bible is this story found in? (Answer correctly and move ahead two spaces.)
3. True or False: The Temple was rebuilt by people who had always lived in Jerusalem because they had never gone into exile. (Answer correctly and move ahead three spaces.)
4. Ezra was sent to teach the people about God's Word. (Tell us one thing that you know about God and move ahead one space.)
5. True or False: Ezra was a king. (Answer correctly and move ahead two spaces.) (False)
6. How did the enemies of God's people try to stop the work on the temple? (Answer and move ahead three spaces.) (They wrote a letter to the king.)

Cross Cards:

1. God remembered His people and helped them to return to their homeland. (Go to map and point to Israel, then move ahead one space.)
2. The first thing the people did was to rebuild the foundation. Then they would start rebuilding the temple so that they could worship God. (Raise your arms in the air and shout "Praise the Lord!" and move ahead two spaces.)
3. King Darius found the law King Cyrus had written, the people were allowed to finish building the Temple. (Stack some building blocks and then move ahead three spaces.)
4. The enemies of God's people were ordered to supply all the needs of the Israelites as they worked on the Temple. (Take the large bags and carry them across the room, then move ahead one space.)
5. God commanded the King Cyrus of Persis, who wasn't even an Israelite, to build a Temple in Jerusalem, 900 miles from where he lived. (Shout "Halleluiah!" and move ahead two spaces.)
6. King Artaxerxes made a law that no one working on the Temple had to pay taxes! (Jump up and down and say "Thank you, Lord!" Move ahead three spaces.)

Exclamation Point Cards:

1. God's people kept disobeying God and turning away from Him. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were taken away into exile and captivity. (Tear up the picture of the city of Jerusalem, and go back one space.)
2. The people were in captivity in a foreign land for 70 years. (Jump up and down 7 times—once for each 10 years of captivity, and go back two spaces.)

3. The enemies of God's people tried to stop the Israelites from rebuilding of the temple.
(Knock down the building blocks and go back three spaces.)
4. When the Babylonians came in, they took the valuable gold and silver things from the Temple, burned the city and broke down the walls, then marched the people 900 miles to Babylon.
(March in place 9 steps, then go back one space.)
5. The people were held in captivity in the land of Babylon.
(Run to map and point to Babylon, then go back two spaces.)
6. The enemies of God's people wrote a letter to the king of Persia telling him that if he let the Israelites rebuild the city, they would not pay taxes and the Persian Empire would suffer financially.
(Make an angry face and go back three spaces.)

Or, 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 to 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 did the enemies of God do to try to get the work to stop?
(The enemies of God came along and tried to discourage the building project. They sent letters to the king of Persia saying that if they rebuilt the city of Jerusalem, they wouldn't pay taxes.)
6. 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.)
7. 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.)
8. 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.)
9. How might someone try to stop you from doing God's work? (They might make fun of you or even threaten to do you harm.)
10. How does God make His will happen? (By the power of the Holy Spirit He can change the heart of anyone.)

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