

Return from Captivity & Rebuilding the Temple

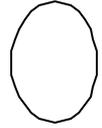
Ezra 1 - 10, Nehemiah 1-8

Look at the pictures of an egg, an unwrapped present and a newly married couple. Each of these pictures suggests a promise.

What good thing is being promised in each picture?

What bad thing might happen in each instance above?

Who is the one who promises to control all the good and bad that happens in the world?



Prayer

Dear Jesus, help us today to understand Your perfect love for all people. We thank You that You kept Your promise to seek and to save that which was lost. We ask that You bless our study this morning so that we may understand Your grace in our lives and learn that in all our troubles You are there to help. Teach us to realize how important it is that we hear and keep Your Word. Deliver us from every evil of body and life. Amen.

The Story

The children of Israel had been in captivity for 70 years under, first the Babylonians and then the Persians. It is at the end of the 70 years that our story begins in the land of Persia under King Cyrus.

Read Ezra 1 and answer the questions below.

What did Cyrus say God had told him?
What did he ask of the children of Israel?
What two things did Cyrus say should be given to the children of Israel by their neighbors?

Under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the priest, about 50,000 people returned to the Promised Land of Canaan to live. The first thing they did when they returned to Jerusalem was to once again worship the Lord as He had

commanded them. An altar was built and sacrifices offered. The Feast of the Tabernacles was observed as before. Also, the foundations of the Temple were laid and construction was begun as Cyrus had commanded. Not everyone in the land was pleased about the rebuilding of the Temple. The Samaritans, a mixed race of people that were distantly related to the Israelites, did their best to halt the building of the Temple. They had originally offered to help in the building but their help was rejected by Zerubbabel and Jeshua because the Samaritans did not worship the true God. So, the Samaritans frustrated the Israelites in the efforts and were even able to get Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, to stop the building of the Temple by means of a deceitful letter sent to the king. For 16 years the work on the Temple ceased. It was not until God caused Zerubbabel and



Jeshua to write a letter to the new king, Darius, that work again resumed.

Read Ezra 5-6:12 and answer the questions below.

What did the letter ask Darius to do?

What did Darius find?

What decrees did Darius make?

Fifty-eight years later, Ezra the priest who also penned this part of the Bible, received permission from the Persian king to take another group of Israelites back to Canaan. Ezra was given the right to rule the area of Canaan and to appoint whomever he thought would be the best rulers. So Ezra led 1,800 men and their families and servants to Canaan safely, despite having no army. God protected them on their journey. When Ezra arrived, he found, to his great dismay that the children of Israel had forgotten the command God had given to them.

Read Ezra 9:1- 10:12 and answer the questions below.

What command of God had the children of Israel forgotten?

What did Ezra tell the people they must do?

What was the response of the people?

About ninety years had passed since the Israelites had returned to Canaan. During that time the Temple had been rebuilt and the people had rebuilt their own houses. Yet the walls of the city were still in ruin. God used Nehemiah to accomplish His purpose of rebuilding the city walls. Nehemiah was the cupbearer for the Persian king. Nehemiah learned about the sad situation in Jerusalem and received permission from the king to return to Canaan and supervise the rebuilding of the walls. Not only did the king give Nehemiah permission to return for 12 years,

he also appointed him governor and gave him the authority to collect, in the king's name, all the needed materials to rebuild the walls.

The work on the walls was opposed by the surrounding people who posed a threat with their armies. Because of the danger, Nehemiah organized the workers so that half would do the work and the other half would stand guard. All the workers were armed at all times. Nehemiah and the Israelites were even able to resist a surprise attack by their enemies. Nehemiah was also personally threatened with assassination plots which, thanks to God, failed. Some people tried to halt the work on the walls by using political methods and lying to the king of Persia. Despite all the efforts of the enemies of the children of Israel, the walls were completed in only fifty-two days.

Now everything was rebuilt and things were back to normal, right? Wrong. The children of Israel had greatly neglected the Law of God written by Moses. So Ezra the prophet was asked to read the law to the people.

Read Nehemiah 8 and answer the questions below.

As Ezra read the law, what did the priests and Levites be sure about?

What reaction did the people have when they heard the laws that they had been breaking?

What did the priests and Levites tell the people they should do?

What celebration did the people once again celebrate after many years of neglect?

Outer Aim - God delivered His people from their captivity and brought them back to the Promised Land.

What the Story Tells Us - Throughout the history of Israel, the children of Israel got into trouble because of their actions. In every case, God was there to overcome the troubles. Sometimes God would use individuals and sometimes God would use kings and entire nations to solve the problems of the children of Israel. Draw lines to connect the problem from the first column with the person or people, listed in the second column, that God used to solve that problem.

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. The children of Israel had been in captivity for 70 years and should return home..... | ...Ezra (the prophet) |
| 2. The children of Israel needed materials to build the Temple..... | ...Cyrus (the king of the Persians) |
| 3. The people neglected the Law of Moses and needed to be brought back..... | ...Nehemiah (the king's wine taster) |
| 4. The people had built their houses but had not finished the wall of Jerusalem..... | ...The people of Babylon |
| 5. The Samaritans had caused the building of the Temple to cease..... | ...Darius (a king of the Persians) |

What God's Word Tells Us

Read Jeremiah 25:1-11. What had God promised through the prophet Jeremiah?

Read Isaiah 44:24 - 45:13. What had God promised through the prophet Isaiah?

These two passages show that God does keep His promises. What other important promises did God make in the passages below that He has kept?

Isaiah 7:14 -

Micah 5:2 -

Genesis 3:15 -

Matthew 12:40 -

What great promises are will still looking forward to that we know God will keep?

Matthew 25:31-46 -

John 5:28-29 -

John 14:2-3 -

Matthew 28:20 -

Your Turn - It is easy to be critical of the children of Israel. Below are listed some of the things they did in this story. Next to the list, explain how we today, in some of the same ways, are often as guilty as the children of Israel.

Children of Israel	Us today
The people were living ungodly lives because they had married ungodly spouses who got them involved in sinful activities.	
The people rebuilt their own expensive houses but were not as interested in rebuilding the house of God.	
The people had ignored the Law of Moses to the extent that they forgot the basic celebrations and decrees of God.	
The people had many sins, but when they turned to God, He forgave them.	

Inner Aim - God Delivers Us from Every Trial

Passages

Psalms 136:1 - Oh, give thanks to the LORD,
for He is good! For His mercy endures
forever.

Matthew 7:15 - Beware of false prophets,
who come to you in sheep's clothing, but
inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

Romans 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren,
note those who cause divisions and
offenses, contrary to the doctrine which
you learned, and avoid them.

Hymn - Answer the following questions about TLH #54.

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;
Hold me with Thy pow'rful hand.
Bread of heaven,
Feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain
Whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliv'rer,
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death and hell's Destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises I will ever give to Thee.

1. How would stanza one have been a comfort to the children of Israel?
2. How is stanza one a comfort to us in our lives?
3. What does stanza three say to comfort us as we approach the end of our lives?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, Please help us to learn that, even though bad things happen in this life, You are always in control. As we studied the children of Israel today, we saw how God took care of their troubles and made things work out for the best in their lives. You have always promised to take care of us and You always will. Teach us to trust that always. In Your name we pray. Amen.