

Return from Captivity & Rebuilding the Temple

Ezra 1 - 6

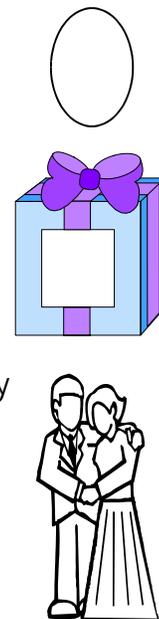
Look at the pictures of an egg, an unwrapped present and a newly married couple. What does each "promise?"

Could something bad happen in each picture?

Who determines whether something good or bad happens in this life?

Prayer

Dear Lord, today we will hear about Your chosen people Israel. We will see how You helped them in their troubles and how even though they did not obey Your commands, You forgave them and brought them back to You. Help us today to understand Your words so that they increase our faith in You and Your kindness and goodness toward us. In the name of Jesus, Your Son, we pray. 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 II. The Lord caused King Cyrus to issue a decree that would allow the children of Israel to return home to the land of Canaan. Cyrus said God had told him that he should rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, so he gave all of the captive Israelites the chance to return home. About 50,000 people took this opportunity and returned home. Besides allowing the people to return home, Cyrus also gave the Israelites silver, gold and other materials needed to build the Temple. Cyrus also returned all of the utensils that had been taken from the Temple seventy years before. Two new leaders were chosen to lead the Israelites back to Canaan. Their names were Zerubbabel and Jeshua. What a joyful procession it was as God's people, the children of Israel, returned to the land that God had promised them, the land in

which the Savior Jesus would later be born!

When the children of Israel returned, they first built an altar on which they could offer sacrifices to thank God for rescuing them from slavery. They once again began worshiping God the way they were supposed to as outlined for them in the Law of Moses. The people also began to plan for rebuilding the Temple. Finally, in the second year after they had returned, the people began building the Temple. It was not as elaborate as the temple that Solomon had built, but that was not important. They were building God a house in which they could worship Him.

The Samaritans were a race of people distantly related to the Israelites. They had continued to live in Canaan when the Israelites were taken captive. Even though they were somewhat related, they did not worship the true God as the Israelites did. When they heard that the Temple was being rebuilt, they offered to help. Jeshua and Zerubbabel would not let Samaritans help



because their false worship would lead the Israelites into sin.

When they were not allowed to help rebuild the Temple, the Samaritans began to hinder the rebuilding of the Temple. They even hired men to help discourage the Israelites and prevent them from finishing the Temple. The Samaritans wrote a letter to Artaxerxes, the new Persian king. They told him that if Jerusalem and the Temple were rebuilt, the Israelites would rebel and not pay taxes and cause problems. Artaxerxes agreed and issued a decree that prevented the Israelites from finishing the Temple. This delay lasted for sixteen years until Darius became the new king of Persia.

When the new king, Darius, came to power, the Israelites decided to try to continue rebuilding the Temple and the city. As soon as they started, the people of the surrounding land tried to make them stop. Zerubbabel and Jeshua wrote a letter to the new king. The letter asked Darius to look into the records and see that they were rebuilding because Cyrus had given them permission and had also said that they should get supplies of gold and silver and lumber at the expense of the king. When Darius checked the records, he of course found out that this was true. So he told the Samaritans that not only should they stop bothering the Israelites, but they should also provide them with everything they needed to finish rebuilding the Temple. Finally, after twenty years, the Temple was finished.

Sometime later, Ezra was allowed to bring another group of Israelites back from captivity in Babylonia. He was given great authority in the land. When Ezra arrived, he found out that many of the Israelites who had returned had started to marry the heathen sons and daughters of the surrounding people. This was causing the Israelites to fall away into sin. After Ezra read the Law of Moses and reminded the people that they were not to intermarry, he told

them that they must get rid of the heathen wives and separate themselves from the idolatrous people. The Israelites took Ezra's message to heart. They said, "As thou hast said, so must we do." So the people of Israel removed themselves from the heathen people they had married.

Nehemiah was the cupbearer for the king of Persia. After the children of Israel had been back in Canaan for about ninety years, word came back to Nehemiah that the people had not rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. The people had built for themselves expensive houses, but they hadn't finished rebuilding the protective walls around the city. Nehemiah asked Artaxerxes for permission to return to Canaan and oversee the rebuilding of the walls of the city. He 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 of the land 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 all Israel was rebuilt and the Israelites were living in the Promised Land of Canaan once again.

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

What the Story Tells Us - Answer the following questions from the lesson.

1. What did King Cyrus say God had told him?
2. Why wouldn't the Israelites allow the Samaritans to help rebuild the Temple?
3. Which king allowed the work on the Temple to continue?
4. In what sin had many of the people of the land become involved?
5. Why was the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem so difficult?

Inner Aim - God Delivers Us from Every Trial

What God's Word Tells Us - God had promised many things to the Israelites and He kept all those promises. He promised that their captivity would only last 70 years and it did. He foretold that the Babylonians would be defeated and they were defeated by the Persians. Throughout history we see that God keeps all of His promises.

Look up and read these passages and tell what other great promises God has made and kept.

Isaiah 7:14

Micah 5:2

Genesis 3:15

Look up these Bible references. What great promises are we still looking forward to that we know God will keep?

Matthew 25:31-46

John 5:28-29

Matthew 28:20

Your Turn - In our story today, we saw how the children of Israel had ignored God's word so much that they had forgotten what it said. Twice today we saw how the prophet Ezra preached to the people to remind them of the words of God. One of those review lessons came in Nehemiah chapter 9 where Ezra recounted the history of the children of Israel from Abraham to the present. Below you see some problems (column 2) that Ezra pointed out in his review of the history of Israel. Read the verse mentioned in the first column below and describe God's solution by writing it in the third column below.

Ezra Ch. 9 Verse	Problem	God's Solution
7	Israel was not even living in the Promised Land.	
9-10	Israel was enslaved to Pharaoh.	
11	Israel was trapped between the Egyptians and the Red Sea.	
12	Israel did not know which way to go as they crossed the wilderness.	
13	Israel had no laws to rule themselves.	
15, 20	Israel needed food and water as they traveled.	
22, 24, 25	Israel had no cities and the people of Canaan were strong.	
31	Israel constantly ignored God and sinned against His commandments.	

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 - TLH 467 v. 1-4

Each stanza of TLH 467 speaks of a "church" in some way. Choose one stanza and explain what point is being made about a church.

Built on the Rock the Church doth stand,
Even when steeples are falling;
Crumbled have spires in ev'ry land,
Bells still are chiming and calling,
Calling the young and old to rest,
But above all the soul distrest,
Longing for rest everlasting.

We are God's house of living stones,
Buildded for His habitation;
He through baptismal grace us owns
Heirs of His wondrous salvation.
Were we but two His name to tell,
Yet He would deign with us to dwell,
With all His grace and His favor.

Surely in temples made with hands,
God, the Most High, is not dwelling;
High above earth His temple stands,
All earthly temples excelling.
Yet He whom heav'ns cannot contain
Chose to abide on earth with men,
Built in our bodies His temple.

Now we may gather with our King
E'en in the lowliest dwelling;
Praises to Him we there may bring,
His wondrous mercy forthtelling.
Jesus His grace to us accords;
Spirit and life are all His words;
His truth doth hallow the temple.

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.