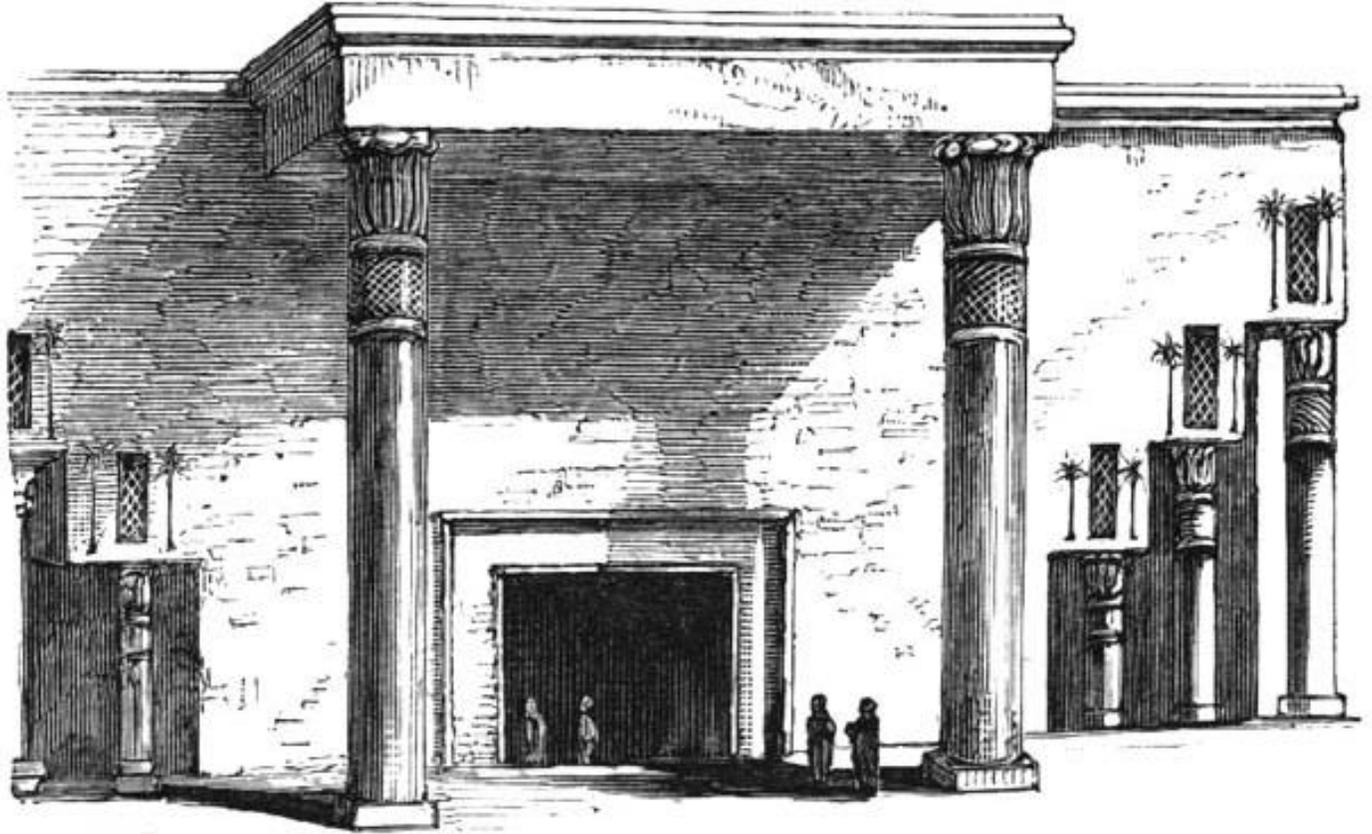


# Return from Captivity & Rebuilding the Temple

Ezra 1 - 6



Temple porch



All of these things can cause us trouble. Tell what kind of trouble each thing can cause. Today we are going to see how God took care of all troubles for the children of Israel. God also takes care of all our troubles.



# The Story

The children of Israel were God's people. God blessed them and gave them a beautiful land in which to live. The land was called Canaan or sometimes, Israel. God took care of them and gave them everything they needed. Even though God gave the children of Israel everything they needed, they did not obey God's commandments. To punish them, God let some enemies take the children of Israel away to a far land as prisoners. The far land was called Babylonia and the children of Israel had to stay there for 70 years.

Today we will hear a story written down by Ezra the prophet. This is not a make-believe story, but a true story. Ezra lived back in the time when the children of Israel were prisoners in Babylonia. God helped Ezra write a perfect story to tell us what happened to the children of Israel.

The new king was named Cyrus. He believed in God. Cyrus wanted to let the children of Israel go home. He made a law that said the children of Israel could go home. He told them to rebuild Jerusalem, the main city of the children of Israel. Cyrus also said that he would give them all the money they would need to rebuild the temple. He also made a law that everyone in the land should give the children of Israel something to help them rebuild their city.

Zerubbabel was the new leader of the children of Israel. He led all the people back to Canaan. The people were very happy to return to the Promised Land of Canaan. God had told the children of Israel that they would live in the Promised Land. God also told them that the Savior Jesus would be born there. So when the people got back to Canaan, they started to build the Temple. The Temple was the

big church in which the people worshiped. The people wanted to worship God and thank Him for bringing them back to the Promised Land.

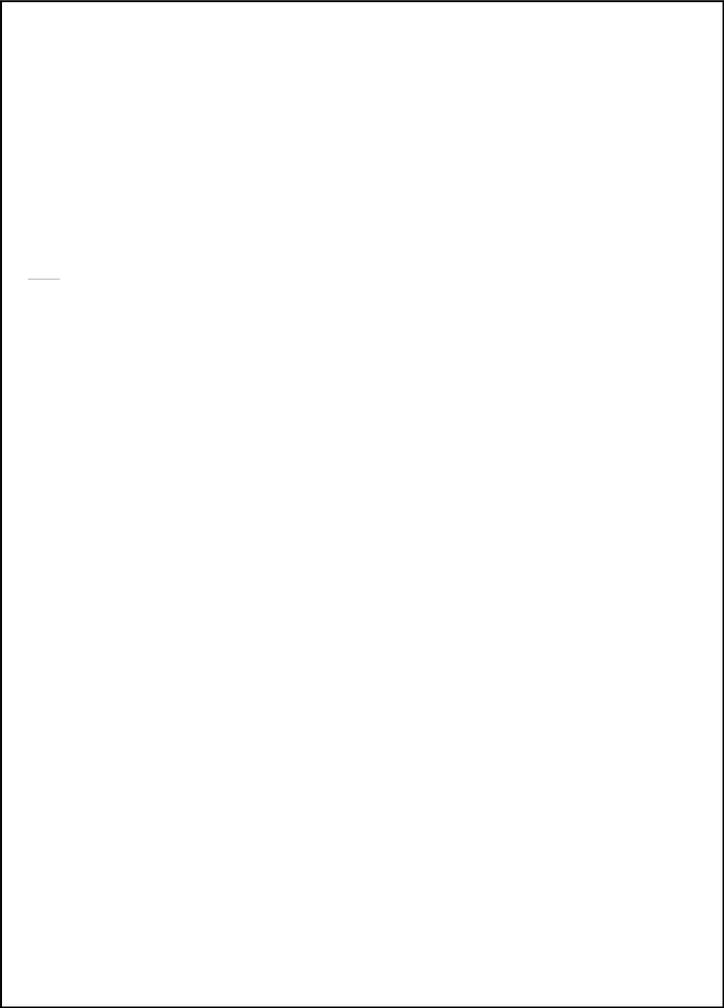
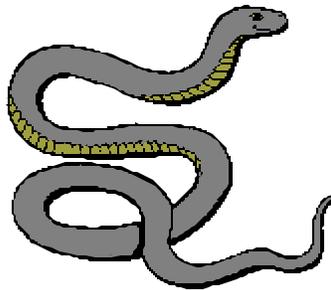
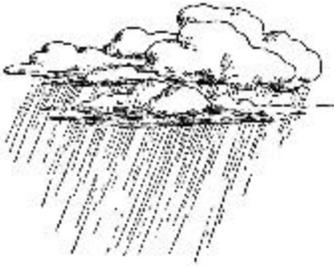
There were many people who did not want the children of Israel to live in the land of Canaan. They tried to stop the children of Israel from building the Temple. They would fight against them with armies. They even tricked the new king named Artaxerxes and the new king told the children of Israel to stop building the Temple. So the children of Israel had to wait for 16 years before they could keep building the Temple. Then another new king came to power. His name was Darius. Darius told the children of Israel that they could continue building the Temple. Finally, the Temple was rebuilt so the children of Israel could worship God again.

You might think that all the troubles were done now that the Temple was built. They weren't. In those days, your city needed to have high walls around them or your enemies could attack you easily. Jerusalem didn't have any walls so they needed to build walls. This was a big job. The enemies of the children of Israel didn't want the walls built, so they tried to stop them again. But God helped the children of Israel to finish the walls of Jerusalem so they could live safely.

Again you might think all the troubles of the children of Israel were done, but they weren't. The Temple was built. The walls were done. The people had a safe place to live and worship, but some of the people ignored God's commandments again. God sent the prophet Ezra to go to the people and tell them about their sins. When Ezra reminded them of God's words, the people repented and started to do what God wanted them to.



**Activity Two** -Circle the things that can cause us problems. What kinds of trouble can these things bring us? The question mark means, "What other things can you think of that give us troubles?" Who will take care of all our troubles? In the box, draw a picture of Jesus, the one who takes care of all our troubles.



**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.

Joshua 24:15 - But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

## Hymn - TLH #636 v. 1, 3

Great is the Lord, our God,  
And let His praise be great;  
He makes His churches His abode,  
His most delightful seat.

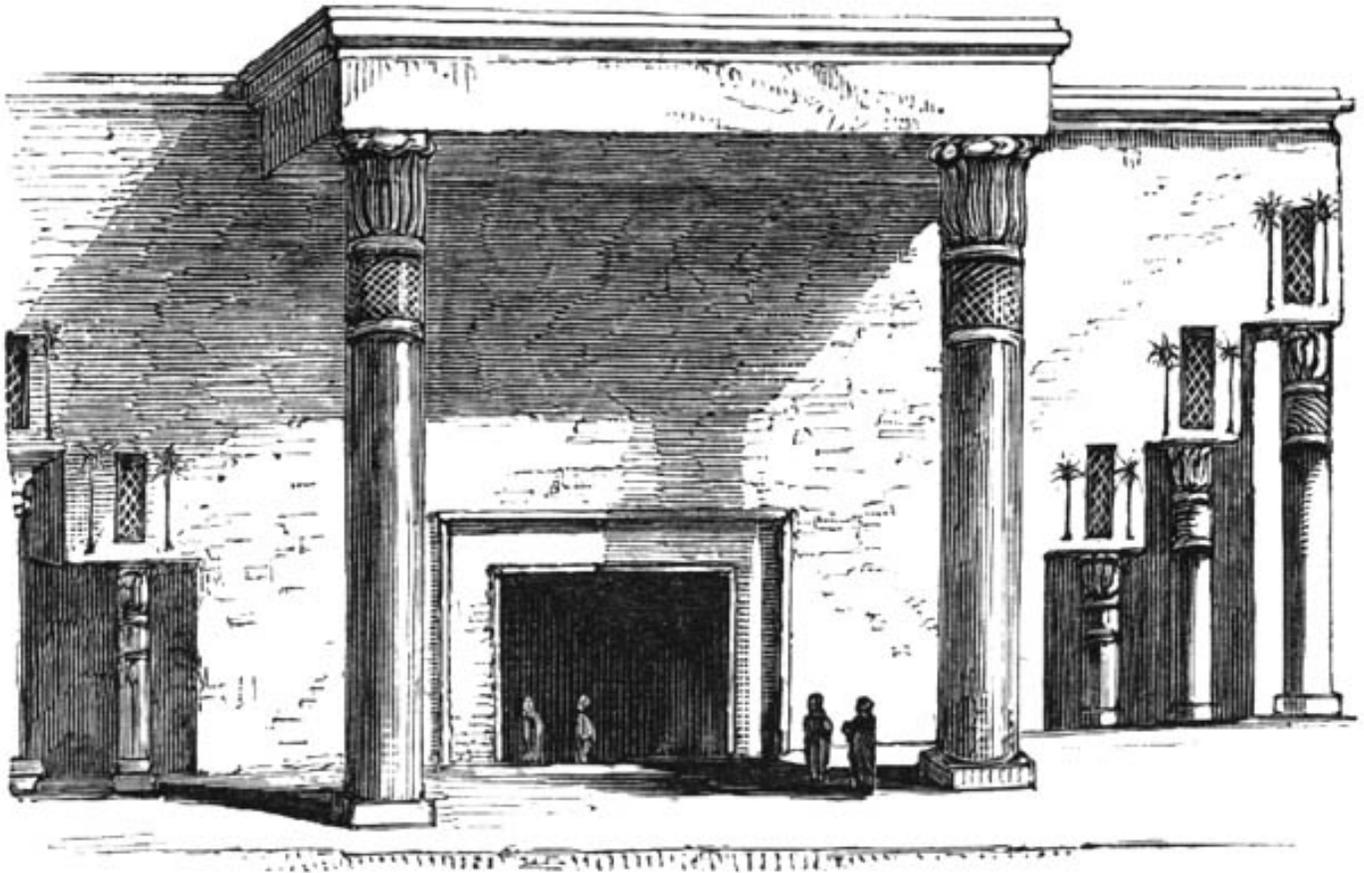
In Zion God is known,  
A Refuge in distress;  
How bright has His salvation shone,  
How fair His heav'nly grace!

## Prayer

Dear God in heaven, we all have some troubles in our lives. You are the only one who can take care of all those troubles. Thank You for showing us in our story today how You fixed the troubles of the children of Israel. Also, remind us that You will take care of our troubles, too. We pray this in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen

# Return from Captivity & Rebuilding the Temple

Ezra 1 - 6



## The Story

The children of Israel were God's people. God blessed them and gave them a beautiful land in which to live. The land was called Canaan or sometimes, the Land of Israel. God took care of the children of Israel and gave them everything they needed. But even though God gave the children of Israel everything they needed, they did not always obey God's commandments. To punish them, God let their enemies take the children of Israel to a far-off land as prisoners. The land was called Babylon, and the children of Israel had to stay there for 70 years as captives.

Today we will hear the account of Ezra the prophet, who lived back in the time when the children of Israel were captive in Babylon. God caused Ezra to write a perfect account of what happened to the children of Israel.

Nebuchadnessar, the old king of Babylon, was dead. The new king in Babylon was named Cyrus. He believed in the true God. God caused Cyrus to let the children of Israel go home! Cyrus told the people to go home and rebuild the city of Jerusalem. More importantly, Cyrus also said that he would give them all the money they would



need to rebuild Solomon's Temple. The Temple was the church in which the children of Israel worshiped. The Temple had been destroyed when the people were taken captive. Finally, Cyrus made a law that everyone in the land should give the children of Israel something to help them rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem. Cyrus put all this in writing so that no one would forget his commands or argue about them.

Zerubbabel was chosen as the new leader of the children of Israel. He led 42,360 people back to Canaan. The people were very happy to come back to the Promised Land. God had told the children of Israel that they would live in this Promised Land. God also told them that the Savior Jesus would be born here in Canaan. When the people got back to Canaan, they started to build the Temple in the same spot that Solomon's temple had stood. The people wanted to worship God and thank Him for bringing them back to the Promised Land. They began offering burnt offerings and sang happy songs of praise and worship.

There were many people who did not want the children of Israel to live in the land of Canaan. One of these groups was called the Samaritans. They tried to stop the children of Israel from building the Temple. They would fight against them with soldiers and spies. King Cyrus had died, so they tricked the new king named Artaxerxes. He told the children of Israel to stop building the Temple. So the children of Israel had to wait for sixteen years before they could continue building the Temple. Then God caused another new king to come to power. His name was Darius and he believed in the true God. When Darius checked the records, he found that Cyrus had given the Children of Israel permission to rebuild the city and the Temple. So, Darius told the children of Israel that they should continue

their work on the Temple. Finally, after twenty years, the Temple was rebuilt. Now the children of Israel could worship God again.

In those days, cities needed to have high walls around them to protect the people from invaders. The walls of Jerusalem had also been destroyed seventy years before. So the people needed to rebuild the walls. This was a big job. The enemies of the children of Israel didn't want the walls built either, so they tried to stop them again. Once again, God helped the children of Israel. The leaders, Zerubbabel and Jeshua, told the people to take turns working and guarding so that they would always have protection. Darius, the king, also made a law that said that everyone should support the work on the walls by giving money and materials. After only fifty-two days, the walls were completely finished.

Now you might think all the troubles of the children of Israel were over, but they weren't. The Temple was built, the walls were standing and the people had a safe place to live and worship, but some of the people ignored God's commandments again. The children of Israel had been marrying unbelievers and then they started to forget to worship God in the right way. God again had to solve their problem. He sent the prophet Ezra to go to the people and tell them about their sins. When Ezra reminded them of God's words, the people repented and started to do what God wanted them to do. They moved away from the heathen people they had been marrying and started to obey God again.

Finally, the children of Israel were back in the Promised Land of Canaan, worshiping God in the Temple and waiting for God's next promise. That promise was that the Savior of the world, Jesus, would be born to the children of Israel in the land of Canaan.

## **God delivered His people from their captivity and brought them back to the Promised Land of Canaan.**

**Activity One** - Answer the following questions together in class. You do not need to write the answers.

1. Why were the children of Israel captives in Babylon?
2. Who said that the children of Israel could return home?
3. Who was the one who really made it possible for the children of Israel to go back to Canaan?
4. What was the first thing the children of Israel rebuilt in Jerusalem?
5. Why did they rebuild the Temple first?
6. Who tried to stop them from rebuilding?
7. How did God help the children of Israel to finish building the Temple?
8. What else did God have to help the children of Israel rebuild?
9. Who told the people that they should listen to what God told them?
10. What did the people do when they heard God's words about their sins?

**Activity Two** - Talk about these questions.

What are some problems that you often have?

What do you do when you have a problem that you can't solve?

Who is the only one who can solve all problems?



**God delivers us from every trial.**

**Activity Three** - Arrange the numbered words in order and write them in the blocks of the city walls of Jerusalem. When you have finished, you will find a passage that all people should follow in their families

8. Joshua 24:15b	4. house,	3. and my	6. serve
5. we will	1. But as	7. the LORD.	2. for me


## Passages

Psalm 136:1 - Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Which people in today's story could have said the words of this passage? Why?

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

Who, in today's story could be called "ravenous wolves?" Do we have this kind of ravenous wolves around today? Where?

## Hymn - TLH #636 v. 1, 3

Great is the Lord, our God,  
And let His praise be great;  
He makes His churches His abode,  
His most delightful seat.

In Zion God is known,  
A Refuge in distress;  
How bright has His salvation shone,  
How fair His heav'nly grace!

## 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.

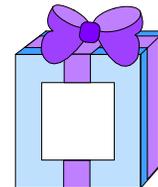
# Return from Captivity & Rebuilding the Temple

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.

# Return from Captivity & Rebuilding the Temple

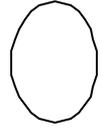
Ezra 1 - 10, Nehemiah 1-8

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.

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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.

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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?

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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.

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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.



## STORY

Return from the Captivity and the Rebuilding of the Temple - Ezra 1-10, Nehemiah 1-8

## TEACHER PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I thank You for the grace and mercy You revealed in preserving Your chosen Old Testament people Israel. You brought them home to the land promised to Abraham and made sure that the promise of the Messiah would be fulfilled in the fullness of the time. Bless this hour we spend in Your Word. Amen.

## VOCABULARY

*Cyrus* - king of Persia who signed the decree returning the Jews to their homeland

*Zerubbabel* - descendant of King Jehoiachin, who led the first expedition

*Jeshua or Joshua* - the high priest and religious leader

*Darius* - King of the Medes

*Ezra* - a priest or scribe

*Nehemiah* - cupbearer of the king of Persia, who led the third expedition

*Samaritan* - a mixed race of people with a mixture of religious beliefs despised by the Jews

## OUTER AIM

God Delivered His People From Their Captivity and Brought Them Back to the Promised Land

## INNER AIM

God Delivers Us from Every Trial

## BACKGROUND

Ezra continues the Old Testament history of the chosen people of God, the Jewish nation. The northern kingdom of Israel disappeared from the stage of history when it was taken into the Assyrian Captivity (722 BC) because of its wickedness and unbelief. The Southern kingdom of Judah was not much better. However, because of the promise of the Messiah, God preserved the tribe of Judah. In 512 BC, the kingdom of Judah was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire. The Babylonian Empire was replaced by the Medes and the Persians.

Ezra shows how God fulfilled His promise to return His people to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. After seventy years of captivity, a remnant of the Jews chose to leave Babylon and return to the Promised Land.

Ezra relates the story of two returns from Babylon: the first led by Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1-6), and the second under the leadership of Ezra, the scribe, to rebuild the spiritual condition of the people (Ezra 7-10). Sandwiched between these two accounts is a gap of nearly sixty years. Nehemiah is a contemporary of Ezra and leads the third and last return to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. Nehemiah challenges God's people to rebuild the shattered walls of Jerusalem. In spite of opposition, the walls are rebuilt in only fifty-two days.

## STUDENT PRAYER

Dear Jesus, help us today to understand Your perfect love for all people. We thank You that You came 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. Help us to realize how important it is that we hear and keep Your Word. Deliver us from every evil of body and life. Amen.

## **PRESENTATION**

### **Introduction:**

The return of the Jewish people in Exile was no accident of history. Isaiah had prophesied that it would happen through King Cyrus who would set the captives free (Isaiah 44:24-45:13). The Lord had revealed through Jeremiah that the Babylonian Captivity would last for only seventy years. All this was put into motion by the intercessory prayer of Daniel.

### **I. The work of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6)**

The Lord caused King Cyrus II of Persia to issue a decree authorizing the return of the Jews to Palestine. He also returned them to the gold, silver, and vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had taken when the temple had been destroyed. Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and Jeshua or Joshua, the high priest, led 49,897 Israelites back to Palestine in 537 BC. It is probable that Sheshbassar and Zerubbabel were the same person. After the fall of Jerusalem, there were no kings from David's family who reigned. This heightened the anticipation when Jesus claimed to be the promised Messiah-King.

The returnees proceeded to build an altar at Jerusalem. The various offerings commanded by Moses were reinstated and the Feast of Tabernacles was observed. In fact the foundation for the new temple was also laid. Some of the older people wept because this second temple was so inferior to the temple Solomon had built.

The Samaritans were Jews who had remained in Palestine when Judah was carried off into captivity. They had intermarried with the heathen people in the area and their religion was part true and part pagan. (Cf. John 4) Zerubbabel and Jeshua refused the offer of Samaritans to help in order to prevent their worship life from being corrupted by the watered down religion of the Samaritans. The Samaritans then did everything possible to frustrate the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 4:4-5). The temple project came to a halt for sixteen years until it was restarted under Darius, King of Persia. It took twenty years to finish the rebuilding of the temple. To encourage His people, the Lord sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to His people. Darius found the original decree of Cyrus and authorized money from the treasury to complete the work.

### **II. The Second Return and the Reforms of Ezra (Ezra 7-10)**

Note that there is a gap of about fifty-eight years between Ezra 6 and Ezra 7. The second large contingent of exiles returned to Jerusalem eighty years after the first under the leadership of Ezra, a priest. Ezra had studied the Mosaic law and sought to put it into practice (Ezra 7:10). Ezra returned with about 1,800 men and their families from Babylon during the reign of Artaxerxes I. Artaxerxes gave Ezra full authority to function officially in Judah with the backing of the Persian king. This included government funding.

Ezra recruited Levites (priests from the tribe of Levi) for the journey. Even though they did not have a military escort, the Lord protected this small group (Ezra 8:31). When they reached Jerusalem, they presented Burnt Offerings and Sin Offerings to the Lord. They also presented the legal documents from Artaxerxes (Ezra 7-8).

It came as a surprise to Ezra (not a surprise in view of the history of Israel) that many of the Jews, who had returned, had defected from the worship of Jehovah. This included the “officials and chief men” (Ezra 9:2). This so distressed Ezra that he pulled the hair from his head and beard. Ezra, then in a lengthy prayer, confessed Israel’s guilt and reminded them of Israel’s past wrongdoing. He also reminded them of God’s judgments and God’s grace in bringing them back from captivity. Listen to Ezra’s words, “And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such deliverance as this, {14} should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor? {15} O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this.” (Ezra 9:13-15)

The chief issue was the intermarriage with the pagan women of the nations around them. The priests and Levites led a move “to put away all these wives and their children” (Ezra 10:3). The people responded with a confession of sins and an amending of their sinful actions. Later John the Baptist would call upon Israel to “bring forth fruits in keeping with their repentance.” In spite of the fact that divorce was forbidden, the preservation of the religious obedience of Israel was more important. This was to be a time of repentance and renewal for Israel.

### **III. Rebuilding the Walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1-7)**

About ninety years had passed since the returned exiles had been in Judea. The temple had been rebuilt under Ezra, but they had never succeeded in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. God used Nehemiah, to accomplish His purposes. Nehemiah, like Esther, was a resident of Susa, and he was the cupbearer for Artaxerxes, the King. The cupbearer was responsible for tasting the wine for the king (cf. Joseph in prison). Nehemiah learned that the Jews in Judea were in trouble and that the walls and gates of Jerusalem were in bad shape.

When Artaxerxes wondered why Nehemiah was so sad, Nehemiah told him about the problems in Judea. Nehemiah asked for a leave of absence and documents authorizing him to procure the needed materials to finish the wall. Nehemiah was given a twelve-year leave of absence and the rank of “governor.” Nehemiah laid down the “mission.” “Then I said to them, ‘You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach.’” (Nehemiah 2:17).

This work was opposed by Sanballat of Samaria, Tobiah of Ammon, and Geshem of Arabia. Because of the danger, Nehemiah wanted to get the walls rebuilt as fast as possible. He assigned work parties to certain sections of the gates and defensive towers so that work on the wall could go on simultaneously. When the walls were about half height, Nehemiah got wind of a surprise attack by their enemies. Nehemiah organized the workers so that half of them worked on construction while the other half stood guard duty. Even those who worked were equipped with swords.

Unfortunately, there were also internal forces at work which threatened the success of God’s people. Some of the Jews, contrary to provisions of the Old Testament Law, were taking interest from their fellow Jews. Priests, too, were guilty of lovelessness. Nehemiah sought to institute a spiritual reform.

There also were plots to kill Nehemiah and appeals to Artaxerxes to stop the project. In spite of this, the walls were rebuilt in a record fifty-two days. Nehemiah also sought to get people to move into the city of Jerusalem.

#### **IV. The Renewal of the Covenant (Nehemiah 8-12:26)**

On the first day of the seventh month, the Jews assembled in Jerusalem in order to read the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law had been greatly neglected. Ezra read the law from early morning to noon from a platform. The Levites helped the people to understand the law (Nehemiah 8:7-8). Nehemiah and Ezra counseled the people not to grieve because of their neglect of the law but to be strengthened in the joy of the Lord's forgiveness. The next day the people learned about eight festival days required by the law including the "Festival of Booths."

Then the people participated in their last known covenant-renewal ceremony. This included expressions of repentance, readings from the law (five books of Moses), and confessions of sins. Ezra led a prayer for the people (Nehemiah 9:6-37). This included a history of Israel's ingratitude and rebellion (the Law), Jehovah's forgiving nature and His acts of love and mercy toward the people (the Gospel). At this time many people signed a document reaffirming their obedience to the Mt. Sinai covenant. They pledged to live according to the law of God. This included refraining from two common practices - marrying pagans and profaning the Sabbath. They also were to support the work of the Temple by an annual tax and by observing the laws regarding the tithes (tenth of income).

#### **V. The Dedication of the Walls and Nehemiah's Second Visit (Nehemiah 12:27-13:31)**

The walls of Jerusalem were dedicated with great joy. After the priests purified themselves, they purified the people, the walls, and the gates. They ended up at the temple where sacrifices were offered in gratitude for the renewal of joy the Lord had brought into the lives of these transplanted exiles. Persons were appointed to take charge of the collection and the distribution of the tithes. The orders of singers and gatekeepers begun by David were reestablished.

His work finished, Nehemiah returned to King Artaxerxes in Susa. When Nehemiah left, things reverted to type. So Nehemiah had to return and deal with the following problems. The High Priest had made peace with Tobiah, the Ammonite, and even had housed him in the Temple. The people were neglecting the support of the Levites by withholding tithes. There also was widespread neglect of the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13:17-18). Lastly, many were involved in mixed marriages including a grandson of the High Priest (Nehemiah 13:4-31).

### **APPLICATION**

God keeps His promises. In the return from exile, God kept His promise to return His people from Babylon after seventy years. More important, God was keeping His promise to send a Messiah to deliver His people. Explore the promises that God has kept in the lives of your children.

God controls the affairs of mighty nations to bring about the saving of many people. Consider how God used the Roman Empire to make sure that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and provided for the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. God still controls the events of history for the good of those who love Him.

God's Old Testament people continually tested the mercy and patience of God. These examples are written for our learning that we do not fall away through sin. God's people tended to ignore the study of Scriptures.

When God's people came back from the Exile, they were more interested in rebuilding their own expensive houses, than in building a house of worship for the Lord. How do we today allow our priorities to become mixed up and confused?

God always preserves a remnant or small remainder of believers no matter how affairs may deteriorate in society or our nation. This is the lesson of the story of Ezra and Nehemiah.

## **PASSAGES**

**These passages can be assigned as memory work or simply discussed in class as to how they fit the lesson.**

Joshua 24:15 - "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

Haggai 1:4 - "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?"

Matthew 15:8-9 - "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. {9} And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

## **HYMN CHOICES**

Great Is the Lord, Our God - TLH #636

Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah - TLH #54

Built on the Rock the Church doth Stand - TLH #467