

Lesson 113

Zerubbabel Returns to Israel

King Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

Studying God's Word

Don't forget! Review the Optional Supplements and determine where you can use them.

Introduction

Slide #3

Refer to Lesson 112 Theme Poster. In our last lesson, we learned how God gave a promise through the prophet Jeremiah that would bring hope to his people while they were living as captives in Babylon. The Israelites had always lived under an old covenant, trying to obey God's laws, but not able to because of their sin. Jeremiah wrote about a new covenant that would take the place of the old one and bring freedom from slavery to sin and eternal life through Jesus Christ, not just for the Jews, but also for us today!

Have the newspaper with headline ready to show.
Let's start with a question: what is a headline? Allow answers.

Show the newspaper you brought. A headline is a title of an important piece of news. It's usually in large print to catch people's attention.

Where do you usually see headlines? In newspapers, online news, TV news banners across the screen, or news apps on tablets or phones.

I want you all to pair up to write a fun headline. Remember headlines are not always a complete sentence. Sometimes words can be left out like, "Free candy for all!" instead of saying "There is free candy for all of you." Think of some kind of news that would be exciting to hear like, "Christmas celebrated every day!" I'll give you a few minutes to write your headline, then you can share it with the rest of the class. Allow 2–3 minutes for partners to work together then have students share their headlines with the class.

Those are some happy headlines! You did a great job coming up with some good news.

Now, I want you to imagine something not so happy. Pretend you are a Jew living in Judah. Think of what it would be like if you and your family were forced to move to a country far away—to Babylon—a place where people speak a different language and maybe don't even like you or your people. But after a while you adjust to the change. You learn the new language, make new friends, get a new house, and start to think things will be okay. Years pass by, and then you hear an announcement or see headlines like these: (write headlines on the board) "King proclaims freedom for Jews!" "People of Judah to rebuild temple."

Would you think this was good news? Would you be excited to pack up to go home to Judah? Why or why not? Allow discussion.

Refer to the Exodus to Malachi Timeline. What we just discussed is what happened to the people of Judah when God punished them for their sin by bringing the Babylonians to defeat them. They were forced to leave their land and settle in Babylon. But the prophet Jeremiah had prophesied at the beginning of Judah's captivity that the people would be able to go home after 70 years (Jeremiah 29:10). And now it was time. Let's find out how it all happened.

The Jews Return to Jerusalem

Refer to the Books of the Bible Poster. Turn in your Bibles to Ezra chapter 1.

Slide #4

Slide #5

Slide #6

Ezra 1:1–3

We are going to start by reading verse 1. Follow along as I read the first verse. Read Ezra 1:1.

Who was the king at this time? King Cyrus.
What kingdom did he rule? Persia.

What does Persia have to do with the Jews in Babylon? After the Jews from Judah were taken to Babylon and had lived there many years, the Persians came and conquered Babylon, and it became part of the great nation of Persia. And Cyrus, the king of Persia, took over. But no matter who the king was, God was (and still is) in control.

Refer to the Attributes of God poster. What attribute of God reminds us that he is always in control? Sovereign.

Right. God is sovereign—even over a king. Take a look at the middle of Ezra 1:1. Who stirred up the king's spirit? The Lord.

The Lord caused King Cyrus to make an important proclamation, or announcement, throughout his entire kingdom. Let's read his announcement in verses 2–3. Assign readers.

What had the Lord charged, or commanded, Cyrus to build? A house for God; the temple.

Where was this house for God supposed to be built? At Jerusalem.

And where is Jerusalem, which kingdom? In Judah.

Who was King Cyrus calling to return to Jerusalem? God's people from Judah.

Slide #7

Slide #8

Show the Lesson Theme Poster. God's people, the Jews, were scattered throughout the Persian empire, but Cyrus was giving them all permission to leave.

Pass out the Class Notes to the students.

Let's start our Class Notes now. Use the word bank to fill in each headline.

Who would like to do the first one for us? Choose a reader. Cyrus. Have

students complete #1.

How about #2. What attribute of God is this describing? Choose a reader.

Sovereign. Have students complete #2.

Who was being set free from captivity in #3? Choose a reader. Judah. Have students complete #3.

Slide #9

Slide #10

Ezra 1:5–6

God was taking care of his people. They could go home now, just as the prophet Jeremiah had said. Now let's read Ezra 1:5–6. Assign readers.

Whom did God stir up to return to Jerusalem? Heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, priests, Levites.

The leaders of the people of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin along with priests and Levites were among those who returned to Judah. The people were headed to Jerusalem.

What were they going to do there? Rebuild the house of the Lord. And they left the country with something. What did the people around them give them? Silver, gold, goods, beasts (animals), costly wares.

These supplies and riches would help them pay for the temple they were going to begin building. King Cyrus also gave back the beautiful things that had been stolen from the temple by the Babylonians. And now there were lots of people and supplies headed back to Judah.

The Jewish leader Zerubbabel led the people out of Persia and back to Jerusalem. Zerubbabel was a descendant of David, the great-grandson of King Jehoiakim.

How do you think the people felt about all this? Allow discussion.

For the Jews who had been in captivity for 70 years, this was an exciting time! The older travelers probably missed their homes. The younger ones would have only heard stories about Judah and Jerusalem, so it would be all new to them.

Slide #11

Slide #12

Slide #13

Ezra 2:64–65

Turn to Ezra chapter 2. Look at all the names of the people who left Persia and traveled home. This wasn't everyone, though. Some Jews stayed in Persia. Let's read verses 64–65 about the people God was leading back to Jerusalem at this time. Choose a reader.

How many people in the assembly, or group, went back to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel? 42,360.

And there were others not counted in the group. Who were they, and how many were there? Their servants. 7,337.

There were also some singers with them. How many? 200.

So, there were 49,897 people in all—almost 50,000! That's a lot of people! God gives a lot of details, doesn't he? That's because this was an important historical event when God was fulfilling his promise given through the prophet Jeremiah to bring his people back to their land.

Who will read headline #4 on the Class Notes about those who went home to Judah? Choose a reader. 50,000. Complete #4.

The Rebuilding of the Temple

After the people got settled in their homes, Zerubbabel took charge and got them started on the building project. First, they rebuilt the altar to the Lord and offered sacrifices according to the commands God had given Moses. It took some time to gather supplies and workers, but finally, they were ready to lay the temple foundation.

What is a foundation? The part of a building laid down first to keep it straight, stable, and strong.

Refer to the Lesson Theme Poster. The Jews were excited to see the foundation for the temple. The priests and Levites played instruments and led the people in worshipping the Lord as they sang a song of praise and thanksgiving.

But there were some in Jerusalem who did not want the temple to be built. When the Babylonians took the Jews away to Babylon, they sent people from other lands to settle in Judah. These people were not happy that the Jews had come back and were rebuilding the temple of God.

So they tried to scare the Jews and discourage them to make them stop building the temple—and they were successful. The building project came to a halt until 21 years later, when God helped his people gain favor in the eyes of a new Persian king, Darius, who said they should finish building the temple.

Slide #14

Slide #15

Slide #16

Ezra 6:16–17

So, what did the people do when the temple was finally done? Let's read that in Ezra 6:16–17. Choose readers.

Who gathered together for the celebration? The people of Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the other exiles who had returned. And what did they offer to God in the new temple? They offered sacrifices. Bulls, rams, lambs, goats.

The Jews had been captives for 70 years in the foreign country of Babylon. They finally returned to Jerusalem only to have to wait another 21 years until the temple was finished. But when it was completed, there was a

great celebration! The people gathered together with the priests. They made sacrifices, sang songs, and offered prayers. The people celebrated with joy. God had once again proven his faithfulness to his people by bringing them back and helping them rebuild just as he had promised. Let's continue the Class Notes. Who will read #5 about what the people did first? Choose a reader. Foundation. Complete #5. Who will read the last one, #6? Choose a reader. Temple. Complete #6.

Application

Slide #17

Refer to the Lesson Theme Poster. Think about God's sovereignty, his control, over all the things we talked about today. God was faithful to keep his promise that the people would return to their land after 70 years. God worked in the heart of King Cyrus to allow the Jews to go back to Judah and rebuild the temple. Then God stirred up the leaders, priests, and Levites to obey Cyrus' announcement. The leader, Zerubbabel, led the people back to Jerusalem. And the building of the temple began.

Although there were some who tried to stop the building project, God was still in control and caused another king, Darius, to command that the temple be finished. Finally, 21 years later, the Jews celebrated with much rejoicing as they dedicated the new temple to the Lord!

Throughout the Old Testament, we've seen God's sovereignty over and over. God said something through his prophets, and it happened. God moved kings to attack nations, and it happened. Sometimes God moved kings to take people away, and it happened. In this lesson, we saw how God moved a king to let his people go back home, and it happened! These are all things that happened because God wanted them to.

That was true back in Bible times, and it is still true today. God is the same God! He is still in control. He is sovereign over every detail of our lives—just as he was in control throughout all of history.

When things in our lives seem out of control, we need to remember—they aren't! God is sovereign and works everything out well, according to his plan. We need to trust that he is in control even when we don't "feel" like it. We may be sad, hurt, lonely, feeling forgotten, or angry. It's okay to feel those things, but when we do, we need to learn to take them to God—to trust God more than our feelings. We need to remember that Jesus experienced those very same things while he was on the earth. We have to trust that, in the end, God is working things out exactly how he wants to. And because God is in charge, it will be good. The ultimate good is that we are being changed to be more and more like Jesus as we trust God even in difficult circumstances.

Lesson Review

We all learn best with review and repetition! We encourage you to play a lesson review game.

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