

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

Change can be hard. We want things to stay the same, to be comfortable. But God often uses change to draw us closer to him and help us trust him.

What are some changes we may fear or find uncomfortable? Allow discussion. Moving away, losing friends, getting older, family problems, changing schools, getting sick or hurt, etc.

Imagine that you and your family are forced to move to a country far away, a place where people speak a different language and maybe don't like your country or people. But 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, and then you're given the opportunity to return home, to the country you left.

Would you take the opportunity and return home? Why or why not? Allow discussion.

What we just discussed is similar to what happened to the people of Judah. They were forced to leave their land and settle in Babylon.

Refer to the Exodus to Malachi Timeline. Our timeline has the year 607 BC for when King Nebuchadnezzar first conquered Jerusalem. That was the beginning of the Babylonian captivity of Judah. Daniel and others were carried away at that time. Then there was a second exile in 599 BC when King Jehoiachin and others were taken to Babylon, and then the final destruction in 588 BC. That's when Jerusalem was burned, the temple was destroyed, and the remaining people were taken as exiles to Babylon.

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 it was time. A man named Zerubbabel would lead the people back to the nation of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. But how many of God's people would take the opportunity to return? That's what we are going to read about today, and you will complete your own timeline of events in the Class Notes. We'll start with the three times the Babylonians came and carried away the people of Judah.

Pass out the Class Notes.

Look at the timeline at the top of your Class Notes. Notice that the years are all BC. Does anyone know what that stands for? Allow guesses.

The years before Jesus' birth are labeled "before Christ," or BC. BC years start at about 4000 (creation) and count down to 1 (near Jesus' birth). The years after Jesus' birth are called AD, which is a Latin abbreviation for anno

domini, which means "in the year of our Lord." Those years count upward from 1 until the year we are in today, 20____ (fill in your current year).

You may choose to draw the Class Notes timeline on the board and write the answers below it for students to copy or use the slides. Our Class Notes timeline goes from 620 BC to 500 BC. Find #1 on the timeline. What year is under it? 607 BC.

Slide #3

Slide #4

Look at the #1 statement below the timeline. Will someone read that and answer what word is missing for the event? Choose a reader. Exile. Have students complete #1.

Who will read #2 and name the country the Jews of Judah were taken to in 599 BC? Choose a reader. Babylon. Have students complete #2.

Who will read #3 about what happened in 588 BC? Choose a reader. Temple. Have students complete #3.

The Jews Return to Jerusalem

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

Slide #5

Slide #6

Ezra 1:1

We are going to start by reading verse 1. Choose a reader.

Who was the king? King Cyrus.
What nation did he rule? Persia.

God sent the king of Babylon to conquer Judah. But in the year 538 BC, the Persians conquered Babylon, and Cyrus became king. The captives from Judah were still in Babylon. It was now part of the great nation of Persia. But no matter who the king was, God was (and still is) in control.

The next three years on the timeline are close together. The year for #4 is 538 BC. Who will read that on the Class Notes? Choose a reader. Persia. Have students complete #4.

Now look again at Ezra 1:1. It tells us who stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus to let the people go home. Who did that? The Lord.

That's right. The Lord caused King Cyrus to make an important proclamation, or announcement, in the year 537 BC.

Slide #7

Slide #8

Slide #9

Ezra 1:2-4

Let's read what it was in verses 2-4. Assign a reader.

What had Cyrus been commanded to build? A house for God at Jerusalem.
What's another name for the house of God in Jerusalem? The temple.
And where is Jerusalem, in which kingdom? In Judah.

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

Slide #10

Slide #11

Show the Lesson Theme Poster. The people of Judah and Israel were known as Jews. They were scattered throughout the Persian empire, but Cyrus was giving them permission to return to their land.

Who charged King Cyrus of Persia to allow this? The Lord God.

What year is given for #5 on the Class Notes timeline? 537 BC.

What's the answer for #5? Land. Complete #5.

Slide #12

Slide #13

Slide #14

Ezra 1:5–6

God was taking care of his people. The people were going home. Now let's read Ezra 1:5–6. Assign a reader.

Who 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 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? 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 riches would help them in Jerusalem. Can someone tell me why? Allow discussion.

These riches would help the people pay for the temple they were going to begin building in Jerusalem. King Cyrus even gave the people the holy vessels that had been taken from the temple by the Babylonians.

God's people had been captive in a foreign land. And now, just like God said, they were going to go home—after 70 years! 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.

For the Jews who had been in captivity for 70 years, this was an exciting time! The older travelers missed their homes; the younger ones had only heard stories about Judah and Jerusalem. And now there were lots of people and supplies headed back to Judah.

Who will read the first statement for #6 on the Class Notes? Choose a reader. Jerusalem. Have students fill in the first blank for #6.

Slide #15

Ezra 2:64–65

Turn to Ezra 2:64–65. Let's read about the people God was leading back to Jerusalem. Choose a reader.

So how many people went back to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel? 42,360. And there were others not counted in the assembly. Who were they, and how many were there? Their servants. 7,337. There were also some singers with them. How many? 200.

There were 49,897 people in all—almost 50,000. This was a big group! God was very specific about the details of this return. It was an important historical event for God and the Jews because God was fulfilling his word through the prophet Jeremiah to restore the people to their land.

The Rebuilding of the Temple

Work would soon begin on the rebuilding of God's temple. Zerubbabel took charge and got the people started. First, they rebuilt the altar to the Lord and offered sacrifices according to the commands God had given Moses. Then they gathered supplies and workers to start on the temple.

Slide #16

Slide #17

Ezra 3:10–11

Turn to Ezra 3:10–11. Who will read that? Choose a reader.

Who came to lay the foundation of the temple of the Lord? The builders.

What were the priests and Levites doing? They began to play their instruments and praise the Lord.

The Bible says they sang as they praised God. What words did they sing in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord? "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel."

And what did all the people do? Look at the end of verse 11. They shouted with a great shout. They praised the Lord.

Why were the people so excited? What had been started? The foundation of the house of the Lord was laid! The temple was being rebuilt.

Slide #18

Slide #19

Show the Lesson Theme Poster. There was much joy and rejoicing in the hearts of the Jewish people, for they had now returned home and were beginning to rebuild the temple.

Who will read the second sentence for #6? This event also happened in 536 BC. Choose a reader. Foundation. Have students fill in the second blank for #6.

But there were people in Jerusalem who did not want the temple to be built. These were the people the Babylonians had moved from other lands to settle in Judah. These people weren't happy that the Jews returned and were rebuilding the temple of God.

Slide #20

Ezra 4:4–5

Turn to Ezra 4:4–5. Let's read that. Assign readers.

What began to happen shortly after the people started to rebuild the temple? Allow discussion.

The people of the land wanted to discourage the people of Judah who were building the temple. They tried to stop them. And they were successful. The building stopped for many years.

But God helped his people gain favor in the eyes of the new Persian king, Darius, and they finished building the temple in 515 BC—that's 21 years later!

Slide #21

Slide #22

Slide #23

Ezra 6:15–17

Turn to Ezra 6:15–17. Let's read that. Choose readers.

What was finally finished? The temple was finished.

Yes! And 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 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. Sacrifices were made, songs were sung, and prayers were offered. The people celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. God had once again proven his faithfulness to his people.

Let's finish the Class Notes. Who will read #7 about what happened in 515 BC? Choose a reader. Celebrated. Complete #7.

Application

Slide #24

Refer to the Lesson Theme Poster. God was faithful to keep his word that the people would return to their land after 70 years. God worked in the heart of King Cyrus to allow the Jews to return to Judah to rebuild the temple. Then God stirred up leaders, priests, and Levites to obey Cyrus' announcement. The leader, Zerubbabel, led the people back to Jerusalem. And the building of the temple began. The temple was finished in 515 BC. The Jews had watched as the first temple was destroyed; they were then held captive for 70 years, and when the new temple was started, there were people who tried to stop it. It was delayed for another 21 years. No wonder there was much rejoicing as the people finally dedicated the temple to the Lord!

Refer to Attributes of God Poster. When we talk about God being in control of all things, which attribute are we describing? Sovereign.

We've seen this attribute displayed by God 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 them 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 in control and works everything out well, according to his plan. We need to trust that truth even when we don't "feel" like trusting it. We may feel sad, hurt, lonely, forgotten, or angry. It's okay to feel those things, but 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 doing it, 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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