

THE EXILES RETURN

BIBLE PASSAGE: Ezra 1–3; 7; Nehemiah 1–2
FOCUS VERSES: Colossians 3:23–24; Ephesians 2:10; 4:11–12

Summary: The Israelite people had been in exile for 70 years. King Cyrus was stirred by the Lord to let some of the people return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Ezra later took a second group and encouraged all of the people to turn away from sin and turn to God. Nehemiah heard about how the walls of his home, Jerusalem, were destroyed. He received permission to go back and help rebuild the walls. God used His people to do His work to restore the city.

MONTHLY Memory Verse

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable.

(PSALM 145:3)

BRITE Idea

God works through His people.

We will go deeper in God's truth by answering these questions:

HE

DOES GOD NEED PEOPLE?
God doesn't need anyone or anything, but He loves us and chooses to involve us in His work.

WE

HOW CAN GOD WORK THROUGH US?
God calls us to share His love and serve others—in our church, in our community and around the world.

ME

HOW IS GOD INVITING ME TO RESPOND?
Kids will reflect and respond to the truth they learned about God.

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Leader TRAINING

LEADER TRAINING TOPIC: PATTERN OF PRAYER

Kids become more comfortable with prayer as they begin to understand the pattern of prayer. Practice stillness. Begin with praise. Confess your sins. Thank God. Pray for yourself and others. Practicing this pattern each week will help kids know what to expect and be prepared to pray.

- **Sitting Still.** Turn off the lights and invite kids to sit still and focus on God.
- **Popcorn Praise.** Call out a letter and invite kids to stand up and praise God for who He is, using a word that starts with that letter (e.g., "God, you are Amazing").
- **Confession.** Encourage kids to sit quietly and reflect on things they need to confess to God. Ask them to ask His forgiveness for those things silently.
- **Thanksgiving Together.** Set a timer and see how long your group can thank God for specific things.
- **Pray for You/Me.** Encourage kids to pray for themselves, asking God to help them live out the lessons they learn. Next, challenge them to pray for someone else.

NAVIGATING A BROKEN WORLD: EARNING SALVATION

Almost half of U.S. adults believe that salvation is earned by doing good deeds in their lives.* Salvation by grace alone goes against our human instinct of working to get what we want. Kids' natural, default belief will be that they have to do good things to go to heaven or to earn God's favor. You may have kids in your group who feel they must do good things to earn God's love. In today's lesson kids will learn that God works through us and that we can serve Him by serving others and sharing His love. Listen carefully to kids' responses, pointing them toward the grace of God. Help them see that our works are a response to God's love and goodness, not an effort to try to earn His favor.

*For more resources on this topic, check out: britecurriculum.com/resources

ELEMENTARY GLOSSARY

Omnipotent: having unlimited power; stronger than anything

Temple: the holy place where God's people went to worship Him

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Bible TEACHING

THE EXILES RETURN
EZRA 1–3; 7; NEHEMIAH 1–2

PRAY: God, please help us see today that You never abandon Your people. Israel's sin separated them from You, yet You worked through others to bring them back. Thank You for Your love that never quits! Amen.

SUPPLIES:
Bible, teaching slides, printable pages, yarn, scissors, hole punch

PREP:
Print the printable pages. Punch holes in the top corners of each page and tie yarn through the holes so the pages can be worn around volunteers' necks.

LEADER TIP:
For smaller groups, use six volunteers instead of 12.

Ask 12 volunteers to stand in a line at the front of your space facing the group.

Say: These 12 people represent the 12 tribes of Israel. God's people had been in exile for about 70 years. Because of their disobedience, the Lord had let their enemies capture them and take them away from their home.

Ask every other person in the line to take a seat. Six volunteers should now be at the front.

Say: Then God led Cyrus, king of Persia, to send some of the people of Judah back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The temple was the Israelites' place of worship, built by King Solomon. It had been destroyed when they were captured.

Ask two kids who just sat down to return to their places in line. Hang the sign titled "Temple Builders" around their necks.

Say: Cyrus also decreed that the Persian people would give silver and gold to the Israelites to help rebuild the temple. Cyrus even found items that had been stolen from the temple and returned them. The people returned to Jerusalem and worked together to rebuild the temple.

Ask two more kids who previously sat to return to their places in line. Hang the sign titled "More Temple Builders" around their necks.

Say: When the foundation was laid, the priests led a great celebration of praise. The people sang with great joy.

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Bible TEACHING CONTINUED

Show teaching illustration: The People Celebrate on the Temple Foundation.

Read Ezra 3:11 directly from the Bible: *And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, "For He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever toward Israel." And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.*

Say: When Artaxeres became king, he allowed another group of exiles to return to Judah. One of these men was Ezra, a priest who loved studying and teaching God's Word.

Ask one more kid from the line who sat down to return to their place in line. Hang the sign titled "Ezra" around their neck.

Say: Ezra led the people to repent of their sin and live like God wanted them to. But there was another problem in Jerusalem. The surrounding walls that protected the city were destroyed. A man named Nehemiah heard this and was heartbroken for his home city. He asked God for help.

Say: Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. The king noticed how sad Nehemiah was and asked what was wrong. Nehemiah shared about the walls. The king asked what Nehemiah wanted.

Read Nehemiah 2:5 directly from the Bible: *And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it."*

Say: The king said yes and allowed Nehemiah to return.

Ask one more kid from the line who previously sat to return to their place in line. Hang the sign titled "Nehemiah" around their neck.

Show teaching illustration: Nehemiah Leads the Rebuilding of the Wall.

Say: Nehemiah rallied the people and began the hard work of rebuilding the walls together.

Ask everyone standing in the line to link arms.

Say: God worked through many people to bring the exiles home and to begin to rebuild Jerusalem.

Show teaching slide: Point to Jesus.

(CONTINUED)

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Bible TEACHING CONTINUED

POINT TO JESUS

Say: The Israelites were returning to a broken city. The temple and walls had been destroyed by their enemy as a result of their sin. Our whole world was broken when Adam and Eve sinned. Our world has pain, suffering, broken relationships and many other awful things. Worst of all, our relationship with God is broken. No one can work hard enough or do enough good things to fix our broken world. That is why Jesus came. Jesus paid the price for our sin, fixing the sin problem and making it possible for us to live with God forever. And one day, Jesus will restore this whole broken world and make it new.

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Review

BIBLE REVIEW VIDEO

Play Bible Review Video. Play the game below using teaching slides: Review Game

SUPPLIES:
Video player, Bible Review Video, teaching slides

PREP:
Designate one side of your space as "Temple" and the other "Wall."

INSTRUCTIONS: *Kids will walk to either the "Temple" or the "Wall" to indicate their answer.*

1. **Even though Israel's disobedience led to captivity, did God forget about His people?**
   Temple: Yes
   Wall: No

God worked through many people to return the exiles home.

2. **How did people respond once the foundation for the temple was laid?**
   Temple: They praised God and sang with great joy.
   Wall: They quit and returned to Babylon.

3. **When Nehemiah prayed and asked for God's help to rebuild Jerusalem's walls, who noticed he was sad?**
   Temple: Ezra
   Wall: King Artaxerxes

4. **Can we work hard enough or do enough good works to fix our broken world?**
   Temple: Yes
   Wall: No

One day Jesus will restore this whole broken world and make it new.

5. **Does God need people?**
   Temple: No
   Wall: Yes

God doesn't need anyone or anything, but He loves us and chooses to involve us in His work.

6. **How can God work through us?**
   Temple: We can share His love and serve others.
   Wall: We can impress others with our talents.

God calls us to share His love and serve others—in our church, in our community and around the world.

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