



Session

8

THE RETURN TO JERUSALEM

FOR THE
LEADER

Ezra 1-3

For 70 years, the people of Judah had been in captivity in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar had captured and burned the city of Jerusalem and taken the people captive. Even while in exile, God showed His favor on the people of Judah.

Before the exile, the prophet Jeremiah had identified the king who would allow the people to return to Jerusalem—Cyrus. The Persian king Cyrus conquered Babylon and ascended the throne in 539 BC. During Cyrus' first year as king of Persia, God put it into Cyrus' heart to build a temple in Jerusalem where the people could worship the God of the Israelites. In so proclaiming, Cyrus gave the people the right to return to Jerusalem along with silver and gold to rebuild the temple.

The leaders of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the two tribes that comprised those in captivity, rallied the people together. Similar to Israel's initial departure from Egypt, the people in the land gave great offerings to help the Israelites as they made their way back to Jerusalem. Apart from silver and gold, the number of items given as offerings by the Babylonians totaled 5,400.

Zerubbabel, the appointed governor, led a group of more than 42,000 people who returned. After giving offerings to rebuild the temple, the people moved back to their towns and their homes. The Levites took the freewill offerings the people had given and began making preparations to rebuild the temple on its original site.

The first act of the Levites was to rebuild the altar to God where the priests could offer the required morning and evening sacrifices. After reinstating the sacrifices required by the law of Moses, the Levites gave the money to those who would be doing the construction on the temple. Work began and soon the foundation of the temple had been completed. In celebration, the musicians played and the people gave a great shout, honoring God for His faithfulness in bringing them back to Jerusalem as He promised.

SESSION FOCUS

TEXT TRUTH

God's people returned to their land as God planned.

BIBLE STORY

Ezra 1–3

BIBLE VERSE

Deuteronomy 30:5

CHRIST IN CONTEXT

The book of Ezra reflects God's desire for the restoration and obedience of His people. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, we are restored to God.

BIBLE SKILLS: Preschoolers will . . .

- Find Bible places on a map.
- Begin to pronounce the names of people in the Bible.



CONNECT WITH FAMILIES

Provide these weekly resources to help families explore the Bible together.

- Explore the Bible at Home (available on Ministry Grid)
- Preschool Activity Page
- Preschool Family Card



MISSIONS ACTIVITY: LISTEN & DO

Tools: Bible, Missionary Photos: Cisero Washington Pruitt (Music & Print Extras)

- Invite children to be seated in a circle. Ask children to play a game in which they must listen and do. Explain: "I will say a sentence. If what I say is true for you, stand up."
- Say statements such as: *Stand up if you like carrots. Clap your hands if you like the color purple. Pretend to drive if you rode to church in a white car. Stand up if you can tell someone that Jesus is alive. Wave your hands if you can say a verse from the Bible.*
- After playing the game, show children the photo of C.W. Pruitt. Say: "Mr. Pruitt was a missionary a long time ago. He listened to the good news about Jesus when he was young. Then he went to the country of China to help the people hear about Jesus."

LEADER TIP!

Include this special missions-focused activity in addition to preschoolers' Bible Explorations.

TEXT TRUTH

God's people returned to their land as God planned.

BIBLE STORY

The People Go Back
Ezra 1-3

BIBLE VERSE

God said, "I will bring you back to your fathers' land."
Deuteronomy 30:5

LEADER TIP!

At the beginning of this session, display Welcome Poster 2 (Pack Item 16) for the remainder of the quarter. This poster informs families that their children will be exploring the Old Testament books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah.

LEADER TIP

You choose! Are your preschoolers ready to learn memory verses? Decide which wording of the session Bible verse you want to use with your group.

THE PEOPLE GO BACK

Ezra 1-3

God's people, the Israelites, had been in a faraway land for 70 years. Now it was time to go back to Jerusalem. The king gave the people permission to return to Jerusalem and build a new temple for God. King Cyrus told the Israelites, "You may return to your homes. May God be with you."

The people were eager to return to their homeland. All the family leaders and the priests prepared to go. Neighbors were kind and gave the Israelites animals, gold and silver, and many other things they could use. The king gave the people things to take for the temple.

Men, women, and children prepared for the journey to Jerusalem. When they arrived, the people gave offerings for the temple to be built. The people then found places to live.

After a while, the people built an altar where they could worship God. They celebrated with a festival for many days. The people gave money to the workers and food to neighboring people who would bring them wood for building.

Then the people began the work to build the temple. Everyone helped in some way.

BIBLE VERSE



From the Bible text: *The LORD your God will bring you into the land your ancestors possessed. Deuteronomy 30:5*

Paraphrase: *God said, "I will bring you back to your fathers' land."
Deuteronomy 30:5*

CIRCLE TIME (10–15 MINUTES, DEPENDING ON YOUR AGE GROUP)

GATHER

- Play music and invite preschoolers to move to the Circle Time area.
- Show children the suitcase. Ask: “If you were going on a trip, where would you go? What would you pack in your suitcase?” Give time for children to respond.
- Comment: “Those are great things to pack! In today’s Bible story we will hear about God’s people going on a trip to return to Jerusalem.”

HEAR THE BIBLE STORY

- Comment: “Today’s story is from the book of Ezra in the Old Testament part of the Bible. The Old Testament tells about the beginning of the world and the history of God’s people before Jesus came to earth.”
- Place the Bible in your lap. Open the Bible to the Bible Book Card at Ezra 1. Begin: “It was finally time for the Israelites to return to their home after being in Babylon for 70 years.” Continue telling the story in your words as you hold the Story Picture for children to see.
- Read today’s Text Truth statement. Tape the appropriate card to the Text Truth Poster.

PRACTICE BIBLE SKILLS

- Look in the atlas or Bible for a map showing Jerusalem and Babylon. Point out Babylon. Invite preschoolers to say, “Babylon.” Trace your finger across the map to Jerusalem. Invite boys and girls to say, “Jerusalem.”
- Remark: “Many Bibles have maps like this one. This map helps us see where the Israelites were living when they began the journey to their homeland.”

PRAY

- Thank God for protecting His people, the Israelites, while they were in exile. Ask God to help you and the children learn more about the Bible and how God led His people back to their homeland.

TOOLS

- Bible
- Music & Print Extras
- small suitcase
- masking tape
- simple Bible atlas or kids’ illustrated dictionary
- tape

PACK ITEMS

- 8 Story Picture: The People Go Back
- 19 OT Text Truth Poster
- 20 OT Text Truths
- 21 Bible Book Cards (Ezra)

LEADER TIP!

Display the OT Text Truth Poster in the Circle Time area for the remaining sessions. Each week, attach the appropriate session’s Text Truth “brick” to the poster.

LEADER TIP!

Show preschoolers where the book of Ezra is located on the Bible Timeline for Kids.

EXPLORATION STATIONS (45-60 MINUTES)

TEXT TRUTH

God's people returned to their land as God planned.

BIBLE STORY

The People Go Back
Ezra 1-3

BIBLE VERSE

God said, "I will bring you back to your fathers' land."
Deuteronomy 30:5

PACK ITEMS

8 Story Picture: The People Go Back
22 Gameboard: Bible Times Travel
23 Bible Travel Game Figures

PRINTABLES

Bible Times Sandals

Set up at least three stations to provide choices of multisensory activities and movement for busy preschoolers. Use the Bible in every exploration.

PACK SUITCASES



Tools: Bible, 2 small suitcases, several clothing items

- Open the Bible to Ezra 1. Put the clothing in two piles.
- Stand across the room with the suitcases. Tell children that you have clothing that should be packed in the suitcases.
- Form two teams of children. Give each team a suitcase.
- Say to the first child: "Let's pretend you've just heard the good news that King Cyrus is allowing you to return to Jerusalem. You must go to the pile of clothes and add one item to your suitcase. Come back to me and give the suitcase to a friend to go get an item to pack."
- After all the clothing is packed, sit down to hear the Bible story.

DRAW ON MAPS



Tools: Bible, washable markers, old maps or atlas pages, Activity Page

- Cut the maps into equal sections so each child can have a map.
- Show a map to a child and point out roads and cities. Comment that maps help people know where to go.
- Show the child the picture on the Activity Page. Say: "Ezra wrote about the Israelites traveling from Babylon to Jerusalem. The people returned to their homeland."
- As children draw, remind them that God planned for His people to go home. Show children the verse at Deuteronomy 30:5.

PLAY A BIBLE TRAVEL GAME

Tools: Bible, Gameboard: Bible Times Travel, Bible Travel Game Figures, binder clips, number cube

- Lay the gameboard on a table. Attach binder clips to the Game Figures to make stands.
- Open the Bible to Deuteronomy 30:5. Read the verse. Lead children to say the verse together.
- Comment: “In today’s Bible story, God’s people returned to their land as God planned. Let’s play a game where we try to get the Israelites to Jerusalem.”
- Lead children to take turns tossing the number cube and moving figures that many spaces on the gameboard.
- Tell children their goal is to get each figure (person) to the finish line.
- Turn to Ezra 1 and tell today’s Bible story about the journey to Jerusalem.

WALK TO JERUSALEM

Tools: Bible, Bible Times Sandals, scissors, tape, 2 index cards, marker, Story Picture: The People Go Back

- Prepare several sets of Bible Times Sandals cutouts. Tape the Sandals to the floor to create a path leading from Babylon to Jerusalem.
- Write the word *Babylon* on one index card and *Jerusalem* on the other card. Place a card at the end of each path.
- Show children the Story Picture and recall that the Israelites had been taken from Jerusalem to Babylon. After 70 years, the people returned to Jerusalem.
- Suggest that children begin at either end of the sandal path and walk to one of the locations. Help children say the place names upon arriving at destinations.
- Turn to Deuteronomy 30:5 and say today’s Bible verse.

DRIVE ON A ROAD TRIP

Tools: Bible, set of keys, toy steering wheel, 4 or 6 child-sized chairs, paper map, Preschool Family Card

- Arrange the chairs to look like a car or minivan. Lay the steering wheel and keys in the “driver’s” seat.
- When children show interest in the props, suggest they talk about a trip they could make. Ask where the children will go and who will go with them. Suggest that a passenger find a spot on the map.
- Lead children to take turns being the “driver.” Advise everyone to buckle up as the “driver” navigates roads.
- Ask the “driver” to stop at a rest area. Show the picture on the Family Card and tell about the Israelites riding animals and wagons to get to Jerusalem.

TEXT TRUTH

God's people returned to their land as God planned.

BIBLE STORY

The People Go Back
Ezra 1-3

The Bible story is printed on the back of the Story Picture.

BIBLE VERSE

God said, "I will bring you back to your fathers' land."
Deuteronomy 30:5

PACK ITEMS

8 Story Picture: The People Go Back
21 Bible Book Cards (Ezra)
31 Bible Story Questions

PRINTABLES

Preschool Verse Markers

NEXT HOUR (MORE EXPLORATIONS FOR PRESCHOOLERS)

Look for printable Next Hour Helps in Music & Print Extras.

SPELL THE BIBLE BOOK

Tools: Bible, Bible Book Cards, Activity Page, letter tiles to spell EZRA, plastic bowl

- Lay the Ezra Bible Book Card on a table with the bowl of letters.
- Read the word on the card and call out the letters. Tell a preschooler: "The same letters are in the bowl. Can you match them to the ones on the card? You will spell the name of a Bible book."
- When the child successfully forms the word *Ezra*, help him locate the book in the Bible. Remark that this book was probably written by a man named Ezra. The book is in the Old Testament part of the Bible.
- Show the picture on the Activity Page and recall the Bible story. Say: "Ezra loved God and served Him. God helped Ezra know what to write in the Bible about the people returning to Jerusalem."

REVEAL A PICTURE

Tools: Bible, Story Picture: The People Go Back, pad of sticky notes

- Cover the entire Story Picture with the sticky notes.
- Invite children to remove sticky notes one at a time and tell something about the picture. As more of the picture is revealed, recall the Bible story.
- Open the Bible to Ezra 1 to show children where we read the Bible story in the Old Testament part of the Bible.
- Find Ezra's name on the page and comment that Ezra wrote about the Israelites returning to Jerusalem.

CREATE A SHAPE COLLAGE

Tools: Bible, long piece of paper, tape, colored construction paper cut into shapes, glue sticks, Preschool Verse Markers

- Glue today's Verse Marker to the paper. Tape the paper to the wall at children's eye level.

- Suggest that a few preschoolers at a time glue shapes to the paper. As children glue the shapes and work side by side, read the words on the Verse Marker.
- Open the Bible to Deuteronomy 30:5 and say: “Moses wrote those words so the Israelite people would remember that God promised to help them return to their homeland. And that is what happened!”
- Summarize today’s Bible story.

READ IN A TENT

Tools: Bible, child’s pop-up tent or sheet spread over a table, several books related to God and the Israelite people, Bible map showing Babylon and Jerusalem (opt.), Preschool Family Card

- Put the tent in a safe area of the room and put the books inside.
- Invite a child to sit in the tent to read.
- Show the preschooler the picture on the Family Card. Remark: “You are sitting in a tent to read. When the Israelites left Babylon to return to Jerusalem, they probably stopped along the way to rest at night. They may have slept in tents.”
- Summarize the Bible story, then read a book to the child. Thank God for helping the Israelites return to their homeland.
- Guide the child to locate Babylon and Jerusalem on the Bible times map.

CIRCLE TIME

GATHER

- Play music as children walk to the Circle Time area.

REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

- Show the Story Picture and review the Bible story, using the Bible Story Questions to initiate conversation about the Bible story.

PRACTICE BIBLE SKILLS

- Distribute Bibles to preschoolers, or tell children to retrieve their Bibles.

- Hold up the Ezra Bible Book Card and say the name.
- Ask teachers to help preschoolers locate the book of Ezra in their Bibles.

PRAY

- Thank God for keeping His promise to the Israelites to bring them back to the land He had given them.
- Thank God for keeping His promises to us.