

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

Ezra 1 - 6; Haggai 1:1-13

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Jews who returned from Babylon and the people of the land

Key-location: Jerusalem

Key-repetitions:

- Rebuilding the temple: King Cyrus permitted Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (Ezr 1:2-4); Jews remaining in Babylon gave valuable gifts to help rebuild the temple (Ezr 1:66); priests rebuilt the altar (Ezr 3:2-3); they rebuilt the temple's foundation (Ezr 3:10-13); harassment caused the people to stop rebuilding the temple (Ezr 4:4-6); life became hard for those who stopped rebuilding the temple (Hag 1:6); the people began to rebuild the temple (Ezr 5:2); they finished rebuilding the temple (Ezr 6:14-15).
- Barriers to the work in Jerusalem: many Jews in Babylon preferred the security of Babylon; Samaritans and people of the land offered to help rebuild the temple (Ezr 4:1-2); Samaritans harassed the Jews to make them afraid to rebuild (Ezr 4:4-6); in a letter, they made accusations against the Jews (Ezr 4:11-16); life was hard (Hag 1:6).
- Joy: people shouted for joy when the temple's foundation was finished (Ezr 3:11-13); Jews celebrated the dedication of the temple with joy (Ezr 6:16-18).

Key-attitudes:

- Jews who chose not to return to Jerusalem settled for life in Babylon.
- Jews' initial determination to rebuild the temple.
- Jews' discouragement when harassed.
- Haggai's sternness when he confronted the Jews for abandoning the rebuilding of the temple.
- People's joy when celebrating.

Initial-situation:

The Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the city, and carried its citizens into exile. The Jews lived in exile in Babylon for seventy years. Then Persia conquered Babylon. Cyrus became king of Persia.

Initial-problem:

King Cyrus issued a proclamation permitting exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple for the Lord.

Final-situation:

The Jewish people finished building the temple. They celebrated the dedication of the temple, and they installed the priests and the Levites to serve God in the temple.

BIBLE STORY

During his first year as king of Persia, King Cyrus issued a proclamation permitting exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple for the Lord. This proclamation fulfilled the Lord's prophecy spoken by Jeremiah.

After seventy years of exile in Babylon, many Jews preferred the security of Babylon over the challenge of rebuilding Jerusalem. The first group of exiles left Babylon to rebuild the Lord's temple in Jerusalem. Their neighbors gave them articles of silver and gold, livestock, and valuable gifts. King Cyrus gave them all the articles which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Lord's temple and brought to Babylon (Ezr 1:1-11). (*The first return was in 538 B.C.*)

The first group of Jews to return from exile to Jerusalem numbered 42,360 (Ezr 2:64-70).

The returning Jews arrived in Jerusalem. The priests rebuilt the altar of the God of Israel and began to daily sacrifice both the morning and evening burnt offerings on the altar to the Lord (Ezr 3:1-3).

The Levites supervised the builders rebuilding the foundation of the temple. The foundation was finished and the people shouted, "Praise the Lord." The elders who remembered the first temple sobbed while the younger people shouted for joy (Ezr 3:10-13).

The Jews were surrounded by people of the land – the Samaritans and old enemies who had invaded the land left uninhabited when the Jews were taken captive to Babylon. The people of the land considered that the land now belonged to them. The Samaritans worshiped the Lord God while also worshiping other gods. They heard that the returned exiles were building the temple for the Lord God of Israel. The Samaritans came to the Jewish leaders and said, "Let us help you build the temple because, like you, we seek your God. We've been sacrificing to him."

The Jewish leaders knew that if the surrounding people of the land helped build the temple, they would contaminate the worship of the Lord by including worship to other gods. The Jewish leaders replied, "We alone will build the temple for the Lord, the God of Israel" (Ezr 4:1-3).

The people of the land set out to harass the people of Judah and made them afraid to continue the building. They wrote a letter to the king and made accusations that the returning Jews planned to rebel against the king. The king ordered a stop to the rebuilding of the temple. The work on God's temple in Jerusalem came to a standstill (Ezr 4:4-24).

Life was hard for the returning exiles. The word of the Lord came through Prophet Haggai, "You're living in paneled houses, while God's temple remains a ruin! You planted much, but harvested little. You earned wages, but put them in a purse with holes in it. Why? Because my house remains a wreck, while each of you is busy with his own house."

The people began again to rebuild the temple of the Lord Almighty (Hag 1:1-13; Ezr 5:2). The work prospered under the preaching of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. The Jews finished building the temple. Then the Jews celebrated the dedication of the temple

of God with joy. They installed the priests and the Levites to serve God in the temple at Jerusalem (Ezr 6:13-18).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the first action of the first group of Jews who returned to Jerusalem?
2. What kinds of opposition did the Jews face in reconstructing their life in Judah?
3. What kinds of opposition do we face in reconstructing our lives to do what God wants us to do?
4. Why did the Israelites refuse the Samaritans' offer to help rebuild the temple?
5. Today, who should Christians avoid cooperating with to do God's work?
6. What was the results of the Jews abandoning the rebuilding of the temple?
7. What were some of the things that the returning Jews celebrated?
8. What reasons do we have to celebrate?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **God does what he promises.** God kept his promise registered in Jeremiah 29:14 and brought the exiles back to Jerusalem.
2. **Many people prefer to hold on to that which they are accustomed rather than accept a new challenge.** Only 42,360 accepted the challenge of returning to rebuild Jerusalem. During the years of exile, the vast majority of the Jews became accustomed to Babylon and chose to remain there. The journey back to Jerusalem was dangerous, expensive, and difficult, lasting over four months. Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside were in ruins, and the people living in the region were hostile. Jews in captivity had accumulated homes and many had gained wealth. Returning to Jerusalem would require them to give up everything and start over again (Ezr 1:5-6; 2:64-70).
3. **God's people face adversaries who oppose God's work; however, facing adversaries is not a reason to abandon God's work.** Opposition to building the temple came after the altar was built and the foundation was laid. Enemies used deceit to hinder the building for over six years (Ezr 4:4-24). Prophet Haggai warned that suffering came as a result of abandoning God's work. And, he challenged them to finish rebuilding the temple (Hag 1:1-13; Ezr 5:2).

4. **Disobedience to God results in God holding back his blessings.** When the Jews stopped building the temple for the Lord, God held back blessings. This resulted in their experiencing hard times (Ezr 5:1; Hag 1:6).
5. **God’s people need to both hear and obey God’s word. God’s word gives God’s people the guidance to do God’s work.** Prophets Haggai and Zechariah guided and encouraged the Jews (Hag 1:1-13; Ezr 5:2; 6:13-18).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Chant:

Words in **bold and underlined** are stressed. Stress words by stretching them out instead of increasing volume.

All	
“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:31 NIV).	
Group 1	Group 2
But <u>seek</u> first	<u>his</u> kingdom
But seek first	<u>his</u> righteousness
and <u>all</u> these things	these necessities
will be given to you as well.	these necessities will be given to you as well.
All	
“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:31 NIV).	