

Bible Story 26: EZRA AND NEHEMIAH RETURNING TO JERUSALEM

SCRIPTURE: EZRA 1:1-4; 2:1,6,4; 3:1-2; 4:4; 6:1,6-7,14-18; 7:6-11; 9:8-9
NEHEMIAH 1:1; 2:1-8,17; 4:12-13,17; 6:15; 8:1-12,18; 12:27

MEMORY VERSE: PSALM 121:1-2

BIBLE STORY:

Around seventy years have passed since the fall of Judah and the Jewish people had been taken as prisoners to Babylon. At last they realized that they had been disobedient to God. They asked God's forgiveness for their sins and returned to serving only God.

Around this time, King Cyrus of Persia has conquered Babylonia and declared that all the Jews could return to their home in Jerusalem and reconstruct the Temple. But not all the Jews wanted to return.

FIRST RETURN: *TEMPLE REBUILT*

The first group of 42,360 Jews returned to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they saw the walls around the city fallen, the poverty of the people and the burned Temple. The first thing they did was to construct an altar and gave thanks to God for their safe return. Then they began reconstructing the Temple. As they worked there were many difficulties and their enemies worked against them. But finally the reconstruction of the Temple was completed and the people joyfully dedicated it to the Lord.

SECOND RETURN: *EZRA*

Around eighty years passed since the first group's arrival. King Artaxerxes was now king of Persia. Ezra was allowed to lead a second group of Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem. Ezra dedicated his life to study and practice the Law of God and taught all the commandments to the people of Israel. When arriving in Jerusalem, he saw that once again the Jews were disobeying God. Ezra ripped his clothes and cried in front of the Temple. As he prayed, he confessed the sins of Israel, admitting to God the things that

their ancestors and the Jews living in Jerusalem were doing wrong. Others joined Ezra, crying, confessing their sins, and asking God for forgiveness. They promised to be faithful in serving God.

THIRD RETURN: *NEHEMIAH*

About fourteen years passed since the second group's arrival. The Jew Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes in Babylon. One day as he was serving the king wine in a cup, the king saw that Nehemiah was very sad. He asked, "Why are you so sad?" Nehemiah told him about the difficulties in Jerusalem, the fallen wall around the city and the burned gates. He asked the king for permission to rebuild the city walls. The king agreed.

So Nehemiah led a group back to Jerusalem. The reconstruction of the walls and gates was very difficult. There was little money, food, water and clothing. The enemies of the Jews tried to stop the construction. In fact, the Jews would hold a weapon in one hand while working on the walls with the other hand. They trusted in God and helped one another. With Nehemiah's leadership and God's protection, they finished reconstructing the walls around Jerusalem in fifty-two days!

The Jews united in Jerusalem and Ezra read the Book of the Law of Moses. These were the laws that God gave Moses. Afterwards, the Jews dedicated themselves to faithfully obey, serve and worship God.

From the end of the Old Testament to the beginning of the New Testament four hundred years would pass without another prophet from God. The Jews waited for the promised Messiah.

LIFE LESSONS:

1. The Jews confessed their sins, asking God for forgiveness. (To confess means that a person admits to God his/her sins, what he/she is doing wrong). God forgave them. Pray and confess your sins, admitting to God the things that you have done wrong, and ask for forgiveness. God will forgive you.
2. The Jewish people, Ezra and Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, serving God by reconstructing the Temple and the walls. Help the Lord by taking care of your church. Also, help take care of your neighborhood.
3. The people in Jerusalem united to worship God. Go to church to unite with others to worship God. Invite your family, neighbors and friends to go with you.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. **FIRST RETURN:** How many years passed since the people from Judah were taken prisoners to Babylon and the first group returned to Jerusalem? What did they find when they returned to Babylon? Why did they first construct an altar to God? What did they reconstruct?
2. What are some ways that we can help our church? Our neighborhood?
3. **SECOND RETURN:** How many years passed since the first group's arrival? Who led the second group's return to Jerusalem? What did Ezra and the people pray? Who did the Jews ask for forgiveness for their sins, the wrong things that they have done? Did God forgive them?
4. What is sin? Do people still sin today? What are some of the sins we do today? How can we receive forgiveness for the sins we have done? What does it mean to confess our sins?
5. Is it important to pray to God about our needs? Why?
6. **THIRD RETURN:** How did Nehemiah serve King Artaxerxes in Babylon? Why was Nehemiah sad? What did Nehemiah lead the people in Jerusalem to do? How long did it take to rebuild the walls of the city of Jerusalem?
7. What are some things we can do to help our neighborhood, our community? Why is it important to help one another?
8. What book did Ezra read to the people?
9. Is it important for you to personally read the Bible? Why?
10. Who were the two main leaders who led the Jewish people in this story? How can you and I serve God with our lives?

ACTIVITIES FOR THIS BIBLE STORY:

Choose activities that may be used in your specific situation. Consider the age and maturity of each person, locality where the story will be told (customs and traditions), and available resources, time and space.

PRESENTATION:

- Show different things that are broken. Talk about how these things can be fixed or rebuilt. If broken items are not available, show pictures of builders working on buildings and houses. Talk about how often it is difficult and costly to reconstruct a building, etc.
- Tell the Bible story.

this now, let us pray. (If necessary, help them with their prayer.)

Be sure to share your decision with your family and friends."

KNOW THE LORD PERSONALLY:

- **ATTENTION:** IF YOUR GROUP DOES NOT KNOW THE PRECIOUS STORY OF JESUS CHRIST, FIRST SHARE HIS STORY.
- As a group or individually, share how they can come to know the Lord as their personal Savior. Example:

"The people of Israel prayed and confessed their sins, admitting to God the things that they had done wrong. Then they asked God to forgive them of their sins. God was faithful to forgive them. They dedicated themselves to obey, serve and worship God.

Each one of us needs to follow their example. We need to pray individually and ask God to forgive us of our sins, the things that we do wrong. God will be faithful to forgive (1 John 1:9). Believe and trust in Jesus Christ, God's Son, as your Lord and Savior of your life (John 3:16). If you want to do

CELEBRATE:

- Celebrate that you have finished this series of Bible stories in the Old Testament. Invite all the family members and friends to come and participate in the party. Prepare games so that all age groups (children, adolescents, youth and adults) play together.
- **Option 1:** Prepare games, such as three-legged race, relay races, Frisbee toss, dunk for apples, decorate cookies, table games, etc.
- **Option 2:** Invite a tall-tale storyteller, a comedian or clowns to come and entertain everyone during the party.
- **Option 3:** Have someone come and paint your faces during the party.
- **Suggestion:** Ask your group members to tell which Bible story was most meaningful to them and why.

MISSION ACTIVITY: "SHARING GOOD NEWS"

- Share the Good News. Examples:
- Give Bibles as gifts to people who do not have one.
 - Give CD/DVD's of Christian music as gifts to family members, friends, neighbors, etc.

**DAILY BIBLE READING - Ezra 1:1-4; 2:1,64; 3:1-2; 4.4; 6:1,6-7,14-18; 7:6-11; 9:8-9
Nehemiah 1:1; 2:1-8,17; 4:12-13,17; 16:15; 8:1-12,18; 12:27**

1 ST	2 ND	3 RD	4 TH	5 TH	6 TH	7 TH
Ezra 1:1-4; 2:1,64	Ezra 3:1-2; 4:4	Ezra 6:1,6-7,14-18	Ezra 7:6-11; 9:8-9	Nehemiah 1:1; 2:1-8,17	Nehemiah 4:12-13,17; 6:15	Nehemiah 8:1-12,18; 12:27