

Use Week of:

Unit 17 • Session 2

The Captives Came Home

BIBLE PASSAGE:

Ezra 1–3

STORY POINT:

God kept His promise to bring
His people home.

KEY PASSAGE:

Jeremiah 29:11

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:

How is Jesus the perfect Prophet? Jesus perfectly reveals God the Father and fulfills what the prophets spoke.

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LEADER Bible Study

God's people had been living in Babylon for 70 years. Some of God's people had died in Babylon. Some of their children and grandchildren were born in Babylon and grew up there. But Babylon was not their home.

Before the people of Judah were exiled, God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah. These are the words of the Lord: "These nations will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years" (Jer. 25:11). Then the Lord said, "When seventy years for Babylon are complete, I will attend to you and will confirm my promise concerning you to restore you to this place" (Jer. 29:10). The time had come for God's people to go back home.

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Cyrus, the king of the Persian empire, had overthrown Babylon. Cyrus took over the kingdom, including the lands of Israel and Judah. In the following year, the Lord did something miraculous in Cyrus's heart. He prompted Cyrus to issue a decree: All the Jewish exiles are free to return to their ancestral homes.

The exile was over! God's people were free to return to their own land. They were free to live as God's special people. The first group of Judean exiles returned home under the leadership of Zerubbabel (zuh RUHB uh buhl). Zerubbabel was the grandson of King Jehoiachin, who had been taken to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. (See 2 Kings 24:8-13.)

Ezra 2:64-65 says nearly 50,000 people traveled back to Judah. When they got to Jerusalem, they began working to rebuild the temple that the Chaldeans had destroyed. (See 2 Chron. 36:19.)

Explain to kids that the temple was the place where God met with His people. Jesus came to earth to rescue God's people from sin. When Jesus returns, He will restore the earth and will dwell with His people forever.

The BIBLE Story

The Captives Came Home

Ezra 1–3

Many years before God's people were taken to Babylon, God promised the prophet Jeremiah that the exile would last 70 years; then God would bring His people back home. God always keeps His promises.

Cyrus, king of Persia, had taken over Babylon. God gave Cyrus an idea. **Cyrus said, “Let all of God’s people go back to Jerusalem so they can rebuild the Lord’s temple.**

Give them gold and silver and animals. Give them gifts for God’s temple.”

The exile was over! God’s people were free to go back to their homes. God’s people got ready, and their neighbors gave them gifts—gold and silver and animals and other expensive things.

Zerubbabel (zuh RUHB uh buhl) **and the high priest led God’s people back to Judah.** They

had been away for 70 years. Many of the people were born in Babylon; they had never seen the land God had given their parents and grandparents. In all, thousands of people went back to Judah. **They settled in their hometowns and set up their houses. Then the people met together in Jerusalem to rebuild the Lord’s temple.**



First, the priests rebuilt the altar in the same place it used to be. They followed all the laws of God for building. **When the altar was finished, they offered burnt offerings to God.** The people also obeyed the law about special celebrations. They had a festival like God had told them to do, and they made sacrifices to God.

Then God's people gave money to stonecutters and carpenters who would work on God's temple. They paid people to bring cedar logs to Jerusalem. Finally, when everything was ready, the people started to work. **They laid the foundation of the temple.** The foundation was important; it would make the building strong.

When the foundation was finished, the priests put on special clothes, and the people praised God. They sang, "The Lord is good. His faithful love will last forever." Then the people shouted and praised God. They were so happy! The foundation of the temple was complete!

Not everyone was happy though. Some of the older people remembered what the temple had looked like 70 years ago, before it had been destroyed. They cried. The noise of the crying and shouting was so loud that the people could be heard far away.

Christ Connection: Zerubbabel led God's people back to the temple to rebuild it. The temple was the place where God met with His people on earth. Jesus came to earth to rescue God's people. One day Jesus will return to restore a greater home for all of God's people, and we will spend eternity with Him.

Bible Storytelling Tips

- **Listen and draw:**

As you tell the story, instruct kids to draw what they hear. After the story, review kids' drawings and invite them to explain details that they remember.

- **Guess what's next:**

As you tell the story, stop at various points and allow kids to guess what happens next. Consider providing two scenarios, one true and one false.

INTRODUCE the Story



SESSION TITLE: The Captives Came Home

BIBLE PASSAGE: Ezra 1–3

STORY POINT: God kept His promise to bring His people home.

KEY PASSAGE: Jeremiah 29:11

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How is Jesus the perfect Prophet? Jesus perfectly reveals God the Father and fulfills what the prophets spoke.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. As kids arrive, ask them what is the farthest they have traveled from home. Where did they go? What was it like being so far away?

SAY • Traveling the world can be a lot of fun. It's a great way to learn about the world God created and experience the cultures of different people, all of whom are loved by God. But it can also be great to come back home after being away. That was especially true for the Jews, who had been forced to live away from their homes for 70 years.

Activity page (5 minutes)

- “Build a Promise” activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete the “Build a Promise” activity page. The kids will put the words of the story point in order using the shape of the blocks as a guide.

SAY • Today we'll hear a story about how **God kept His promise to bring His people home.** The Israelites had lived in a different country for 70 years, and it was finally time for them to return to their own land.

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Treasure hunt

Prior to the session hide play money or gold-colored plastic coins around the room. During the session, encourage the kids to search the room to find the treasures. Once kids find all the objects, invite them to return to the center of the room.

SAY • We are going to hear a special story today about how God's people returned home from living in a foreign country for 70 years! We will hear that the people of Babylon gave God's people gold and silver coins, as well as other gifts, when they went home.

LOW PREP

- play money
- gold-colored plastic coins (optional)

OPTION 2: Build a tower

Provide a variety of building materials and invite the kids to form groups of two or three kids to work together to build a tower. Help them experiment with different foundations for their towers. Give the groups a chance to present their towers to the rest of the class.

SAY • For any building to stand tall and strong, it must have a solid foundation. Today our story is about God's people's return to the land God had given them. Not only did they return, but they also set out to rebuild the destroyed temple. Today we'll hear that they began by building a strong foundation.

- various building materials (blocks, interlocking bricks, interlocking logs, cups, cereal boxes, and so forth)

Transition to teach the story

TEACH the Story



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Countdown

• countdown video

Show the countdown video as you transition to teach the story. Set it to end as the session begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

- leader attire
- small suitcase
- airport map
- travel pillow
- stuffed cow

[Leader enters carrying a small suitcase, an airport map, and a travel pillow around his/her neck.]

LEADER • Hey, friends! It's great to see you again. Thanks for picking me up from the airport again this week. I've been traveling so much it seems like I haven't been home in forever! Well, maybe not forever. I guess I've only been gone for five days. But even just a few days away from home makes me homesick. Do you ever get homesick when you travel? The thing I always miss the most is sleeping in my own bed. *[Pull a stuffed cow from the suitcase.]* Sir Loin here always travels with me wherever I go, but it's still nice to get home to my own bed.

You know, a five day trip away from home may seem like a long time, but the Bible story I have for you today makes it seem like the blink of an eye. You see, in this story God's people were away from

Tip: If you prefer not to use themed content or characters, adapt or omit this introduction.

home for 70 years!

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • Before we begin, let's remember our big picture question, *How is Jesus the perfect Prophet?* Does anyone remember the answer? That's right. *Jesus perfectly reveals God the Father and fulfills what the prophets spoke.* That means that Jesus' words, thoughts, and actions were exactly in line with what God the Father wanted. Because Jesus is God the Son, He has all power and authority. Every prophecy in the Old Testament led to Jesus, and all God's promises will come true in Jesus.

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

• Giant Timeline

LEADER • The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah told God's people that because they repeatedly disobeyed God they would be sent into exile. Exile is when someone is forced to leave his or her country and move somewhere else. God's people were sent into exile to Babylon. The stories about Daniel in the lions' den and the three friends being saved from the fiery furnace all happened in Babylon during the exile. Jeremiah also prophesied that the exile would only last for 70 years. At the end of those 70 years, it was finally time for God's people to return to their homeland.

• Bibles
• "The Captives Came Home" video
• Big Picture Question Poster
• Bible Story Picture Poster
• Story Point Poster

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Ezra 1–3. Use the Bible storytelling tips

on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “The Captives Came Home.”

LEADER • God’s people had gone through some pretty rough times during their exile in Babylon. Do you think God had forgotten about them? No way! God never stopped loving His children. They were His chosen people, and He had long ago promised that He would never abandon them. In fact, God had been using their time in exile to glorify Himself and bless the world. Many kings and people who did not know God saw firsthand His power and love for His people.

God had told His people through prophets like Ezekiel and Jeremiah that the exile would not last forever. When God makes a promise you can believe that He will always keep it. **God kept His promise to bring His people home.**

The Bible tells us that “the Lord roused the spirit of King Cyrus” to allow the people to return to Israel. Clearly God was at work to bring His people home. Our God is in total control. He knows all things and has the power to make anything happen that He wants. King Cyrus even demanded that the people of Babylon give silver, gold, livestock, and other valuables to the Israelites. As a result, they had the money and materials they needed to begin rebuilding the temple and their homes. God provides for His people always, and sometimes He provides in surprising ways.

Note: You may use this opportunity to use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

Christ connection

LEADER • During their time in exile, the people may have

felt hopeless. Over time they may have wondered if God had forgotten about them or if God was really going to keep His promise. But God's plan for His people was bigger than they knew.

Zerubbabel led God's people back to the temple to rebuild it. The temple was the place where God met with His people on earth. Jesus came to earth to rescue God's people. One day Jesus will return to restore a greater home for all of God's people, and we will spend eternity with Him.

Questions from kids video (3 minutes)

Show the "Unit 17, Session 2" questions from kids video. Prompt kids to think about how people worship God. Discuss whether or not the kids have favorite ways to worship God.

• "Unit 17, Session 2"
Questions from Kids
Video



Missions moment (3 minutes)

LEADER • God kept His promise to bring His people home. God always keeps His promises.

Adoniram Judson was a missionary to Burma—now called Myanmar—a long, long time ago. He isn't alive anymore, but God is still being faithful to the people who live there. Let's learn more about the Karen (kah-REN) people who live in the same place where Adoniram Judson worked.

Play the "Karen People of Myanmar" missions video. Close by saying a prayer that people all over the world would hear about Jesus.

• "Karen People of
Myanmar" missions
video

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read

• Key Passage Poster
• "A Future and a Hope"
song

together Jeremiah 29:11. Then sing “A Future and a Hope.”

LEADER • Jeremiah the prophet wrote these words to the exiles in Babylon; the exile would not last forever. Hundreds of years later, these words still comfort believers who are going through hard times. Jeremiah’s words remind us of a similar promise we have through Jesus. God has planned for Jesus to return someday. When He does, all evil will be destroyed and everyone who has faith in Him will live forever in God’s kingdom.

Sing (4 minutes)

• “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” song

LEADER • In the Book of Psalms, King David wrote that he eagerly searched for God and that his soul thirsted for God. Our souls are thirsty for God too. We can worship Him and find that He quenches our thirst. Let’s sing praise to Him now.
Sing together “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

LEADER • God, we praise You because Your plans are good. We are thankful that even during difficult times we know we can trust You. We are glad that You are in control of everything and that You always work everything out according to Your will. Thank You for hearing us when we pray and for always loving us. Amen.

Dismiss to apply the story

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. Provide *I'm a Christian Now!* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

APPLY the Story



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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How is Jesus the perfect Prophet? Jesus perfectly reveals God the Father and fulfills what the prophets spoke.

Key passage activity (5 minutes)

• Key Passage Poster

Invite the kids to sit in a circle. Begin a pat-pat-clap-clap rhythm as you say the key passage. The kids should imitate the rhythm and repeat the phrases as you say them. Give the kids an opportunity to create their own rhythms to go along with the verse and let them lead the rest of the class.

SAY • You are doing a great job memorizing our key passage. Jeremiah was a prophet, and so is Jesus. ***How is Jesus the perfect Prophet? Jesus perfectly reveals God the Father and fulfills what the prophets spoke.*** Let's keep working on our key passage this week, and when we come back together next week we'll see if anyone can say it from memory!

Discussion & Bible skills (10 minutes)

• Bibles, 1 per kid
• Story Point Poster
• Small Group Timeline and Map Set
(005802970, optional)

Distribute a Bible to each kid. Help the kids find Ezra 1–3. Remind the kids that the Book of Ezra is found in the Old Testament History division. Ask a volunteer to name the other books in that division (*Joshua–Esther*). You may choose to display the Old Testament Mediterranean Map to help the kids understand the long distances traveled by God's people to reach Jerusalem (*G10*).

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss:

1. Which king of Persia allowed God's people to return to Israel? (*King Cyrus, Ezra 1:1*)
2. What did the priests build first when they got back to Israel? (*the altar, Ezra 3:2*)
3. Why were some of the older Israelites crying? (*They remembered the first temple that had been destroyed, Ezra 3:12*)
4. Why do you think God allowed His people to live in exile for 70 years? *Guide the kids to see that God takes sin seriously. He wanted to purify His people; to punish sin and bring new life to the people who truly wanted to follow Him. God wanted to give His children a chance to recognize their sin and turn back to Him. He used the exile to glorify Himself in foreign nations.*
5. How can we know God loves us in difficult times? *Help kids understand that God's love for us never changes. We don't always understand why we face hard times but we can trust that God will never leave us. He will never stop loving us. Sometimes He allows us to experience pain so we can better understand how much we need Him. When we face hard times while relying on God, it glorifies Him and builds our faith.*
6. The temple needed a strong foundation. What is the foundation of our lives? *Help kids see that our faith is built on Jesus' sacrifice for us. We trust the Bible as God's Word, and it tells us what is true about God and ourselves. With such a firm foundation, our lives can stand up to various trials.*

SAY • God kept His promise to bring His people home.

The Israelites returned to their homeland and began rebuilding the temple so they could worship God.

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

LOW PREP

Tip: Use this activity option to reinforce the missions moment found in Teach the Story.

Activity choice (10 minutes)



OPTION 1: Good manners

SAY • People all over the world are different and have different ways to show respect. For example, we might shake hands with someone we are greeting. [*Demonstrate shaking hands.*] This is considered polite. Let's find out more about the culture of the Karen people.

Direct kids to slowly walk around the room and respond to the following commands as you give them:

- When you walk past someone, bow your head to be lower than their head.
- Don't look at anyone's eyes. This is considered rude in Myanmar.
- Find something to give to another person, but make sure you use two hands.
- Stop to talk with someone and cross your arms in front of you. This is a sign of respect.

OPTION 2: Roll lumber

Form two teams of kids and instruct them to line up on one side of the room. On the opposite side, place two piles of pool noodles, one per team. When you say go, the first kid from each team will race to the pile of noodles, grab a noodle, and roll it back to her team. Then the second kid on each team will do the same. The first team to get all their noodles to their side wins

SAY • The Israelites paid the people in Lebanon for lumber to rebuild God's temple. The people had to work hard to get all the necessary building materials, but they knew that the work was worth it. They were desperate to have a place to worship God.

• pool noodles

Thankfully, we no longer need to go to a temple to worship God. Because Jesus died on the cross for our sins, we can worship God anywhere. The Holy Spirit lives inside of believers, so in a way, our bodies are the temples!

Reflection and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute a sheet of paper to each child. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or about the gospel?
- What does this story teach me about myself?
- Whom can I tell about this story?

Make sure to send the sheets home with kids alongside the activity page so that parents can see what their kids have been learning.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray for your group.

• pencils and crayons
• paper
• Bible Story Coloring
Page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's Big Picture Cards for Families to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.