



*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.

**INTRODUCE THE STORY**  
(10–15 MINUTES)  
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**TEACH THE STORY**  
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**APPLY THE STORY**  
(25–30 MINUTES)  
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Additional resources are available at [gospelproject.com](http://gospelproject.com). For free training and session-by-session help, visit [ministrygrid.com/gospelproject](http://ministrygrid.com/gospelproject).

## 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.

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. Prompt kids to think what they love best about where they live. Invite them to share what they like best about returning home after being away.

**SAY** • Today we will hear about God's people who had been away from home for 70 years. They finally got to return home! Can you imagine being away from home for 70 years?

## Activity page (5 minutes)

- "Set the Scene" activity page,
- 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete "Set the Scene" on the activity page. In the first space, kids should draw a few people who are happy. In the second space, they should draw a few people who are sad.

**SAY** • In today's Bible story, we will see that **God kept His promise to bring His people home.** Not only did they get to return home, they got to rebuild something that was very special to them. Any guesses what it was?

## Session starter (10 minutes)

### OPTION 1: Praise God

**LOW  
PREP**

Form groups of three or four kids. Challenge each group to make a tune to these words for a worship song: “The Lord is good. His faithful love will last forever.” They may also choreograph movements with their new song.

Give kids a few minutes to work, and then invite volunteers to share their songs with the class. Challenge the kids to listen today for any time you say the phrase “praise God.” When kids hear those words, they should say, “The Lord is good. His faithful love will last forever.”

**SAY** • In today’s Bible story, God’s people had many reasons to praise God. [Pause.] His people sang praises to Him, saying “The Lord is good. His faithful love will last forever.” God is faithful; He keeps all His promises. **God kept His promise to bring His people home.** And to that we say, “praise God!”

### OPTION 2: Pack up, head home

Form two groups of kids. Line up each team at one side of the room. Give each kid an overnight item. Position a suitcase across from each team.

Explain that kids will pack their bags so they can head home. When a kid places an item into the suitcase, he should shout something he can praise God for. The first team to completely pack and close its suitcase wins.

**SAY** • After 70 years, God’s people returned home. They knew God had kept His promises. They praised Him! Not everyone was happy though. Some were shouting and crying. Let’s find out why.

• overnight bags or suitcases, 2  
• overnight items, 1 per kid (T-shirts, toothbrushes, toothpaste, pairs of shoes, socks, books, and so on)

## 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 enters, smiling and carrying a suitcase.]*

• leader attire

• suitcase

**LEADER** • Home sweet home! I can't believe I am finally back after a year of traveling the world. I missed so many things about home: the smells, the food, my friends and family. There is always something special about coming home, isn't there?

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

If I am this happy to be home, imagine how God's people felt returning home after being away for 70 years! Some had been born in Babylon and had never even seen their home. **God kept His promise to bring His people home.** Right away, God's people got busy rebuilding something that was very important to them. Any guesses what it is? *[Allow kids to respond.]* They worked so hard; you would think everyone would be thrilled. Well, that was not the case. Oh, I can't wait for you to hear about it! Let's get started.



## Big picture question (1 minute)

**LEADER** • First, let's review our big picture question and answer: ***How is Jesus the perfect Prophet? Jesus perfectly reveals God the Father and fulfills what the prophets spoke.***

Listen for the name *Zerubbabel* in today's Bible story. Zerubbabel led God's people to rebuild the temple, but Jesus did something even greater.

Jesus came to earth to rescue God's people. He told the Jews, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days" (John 2:19). Jesus was talking about His body as a temple. He would die and then rise on the third day. One day, Jesus will return to restore a greater home for all of God's people.

## Giant timeline (1 minute)

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

**LEADER** • We can trust God to keep His promises. This timeline is full of true stories about times when God kept His promises. God sent the prophet Obadiah to talk to the people. **God promised to restore Israel and rule the earth as King.**

Did God keep that promise? Yes! Our story today goes back to a promise God made to the prophet Jeremiah. Who can find Jeremiah on our timeline? [Allow a volunteer to point to "Jeremiah, Prophet to Judah" from Unit 15.]

Many years before God's people were taken captive, God told Jeremiah that the exile would last 70 years. Did God keep that promise? Of course. In today's Bible story, we will see yet again that God



keeps His promises. **God kept His promise to bring His people home.**

## 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** • Have you ever felt disappointed when something didn’t turn out like you thought it should?

There were so many feelings and emotions in this story! Some people were excited because they were getting to go home and celebrate God’s keeping His promises. Some people were nervous because they were traveling to a place they had never seen but had heard stories about for years and years.

God’s people had started to rebuild the temple. When the people finished the foundation, they celebrated. But some of the older people, who had seen the temple that Solomon had built, cried. Why do you think they cried? *[Allow kids to respond.]*

I’m sure it was sad to think about the beautiful temple that had been torn down. They had memories of how their home used to be, but it no longer looked the same.

Sin has consequences. The Israelites had endured 70 years of consequences for their sin. **God kept His promise to bring His people home.**

## Christ connection

**LEADER** • 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

- Bibles
- “The Captives Came Home” video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster
- Story Point Poster

Tip: Use Scripture and the guide provided on page 115 to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

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 ways to worship God. Guide them to discuss their favorite ways to worship.

• "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 a country called Burma (now known as Myanmar) more than 150 years ago. Adoniram isn't alive anymore, but God is still faithful to the people who live in that country. [*Point to Myanmar on a map.*]

Let's learn more about the Karen (kah-REN) people who live in the place where Adoniram Judson told people about Jesus.

• "Karen People of Myanmar" missions video  
• world map

Play the "Karen People of Myanmar" missions video. Close by praying for the Karen people and for the missionaries working in Myanmar.

## Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Jeremiah 29:11.

**LEADER • After 70 years of exile, God kept His promise to bring His people home.** What God says is true. He has a plan, and He keeps His promises.

Sometimes you may find yourself waiting on God's promise. God's plan doesn't always happen right

• Key Passage Poster  
• "A Future and a Hope (Jer. 29:11) song

away, but God's plan always happens at just the right time.

Lead boys and girls in singing "A Future and a Hope (Jer. 29:11)."

### **Sing (4 minutes)**

Open your Bible and read aloud 1 Chronicles 16:34.

**LEADER** • The God we serve today is the same faithful God His people worshiped after they returned home. He is good, He is faithful, and He is worthy of all praise. Sing together "Great Is Thy Faithfulness."

### **Pray (2 minutes)**

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

**LEADER** • God, You keep Your promises. Because You are faithful, we can trust You. God, we confess that we are often unfaithful. Thank You for sending Jesus to rescue us. We look forward to the day He comes back so we can live with You forever. You will make everything right again! We love You. 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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**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.

## Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- music note cutouts
- marker

Before the session, write words or phrases of the key passage on separate music notes. Prepare two sets.

Display the key passage poster. Lead kids in reading aloud Jeremiah 29:11. Form two groups of kids. Give each group a set of music note cutouts. Challenge them to arrange the notes in order. Consider inviting kids to sing the words of the key passage.

**SAY** • That was great! We can praise God because He knows the plans He has for His people. We can trust Him because God keeps His promises. What a joy it is to praise Him.

## Discussion & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Story Point Poster

Distribute Bibles. Guide boys and girls to open their Bibles to Ezra 1–3. Explain that the Book of Ezra is in the Old Testament. No one knows for certain who wrote it, but some believe it was the scholar and scribe named Ezra. The events in this book happened between 450 and 500 years before Jesus was born.

Choose a volunteer to read aloud Ezra 3:11.

**SAY** • After the people praised God, they gave a loud shout.

Let's hear you give a shout after I say "The Lord is good. His faithful love will last forever." Ready? The Lord is good. His faithful love will last forever. *[Encourage kids to shout and cheer.]*

**God kept His promise to bring His people home.** God's people returned home to rebuild the temple. They laid the foundation and praised Him. God is faithful, He has a plan, and we can trust Him.

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss:

1. What promise did God keep for His people? *Prompt kids to recall that **God kept His promise to bring His people home.** God spoke this promise to the prophet Jeremiah more than 70 years before the exile.* (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Jer. 29:10.)
2. How do we know we can we trust God to keep His promises? *Point out that over and over again, God not only makes promises, but He keeps them. Many of us make promises but are guilty of not keeping our promises. God isn't like us. He is always faithful. We can put our trust in Him.* (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Heb. 10:23.)
3. Will you trust God when things don't make sense? Why? *Emphasize that there will be times in kids' lives when things just don't make sense. They may not know why something happened or didn't happen. Remind kids that God's Word tells us to trust Him and not lean on our own understanding.* (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Prov. 3:5-6.)

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 from Teach the Story.

### Activity choice (10 minutes)



**OPTION 1:** Cultural greetings

**SAY** • People all over the world are different and



have different ways of showing 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 (kah-REN) 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 lower than his or her head.
- Don't look at anyone's eyes. This is considered rude.
- 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:** Building snack

Before the session, assemble snack bags for each kid that include pretzel sticks, mini marshmallows, and an index card with the words *I promise to pray for you* written on it.

Distribute the bags and invite kids to write any specific prayer requests they have on the back of the index card. They are welcome to sign their name but may feel more comfortable not signing their name. Collect the cards.

Guide kids to build a foundation (a strong square or rectangle structure) for a temple using pretzel sticks and marshmallows. As they work on their foundations, play music in the background. You may choose to allow kids to snack on their "building supplies" as they build.

**SAY** • Your temple foundations look great. In Bible times, 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

- Allergy Alert
- mini marshmallows
- pretzel sticks
- snack bags
- index cards
- markers
- pens
- "Always in Control (This I Know)" song (optional)

a greater home for all of God's people, and we will spend eternity with Him. ***How is Jesus the perfect Prophet? Jesus perfectly reveals God the Father and fulfills what the prophets spoke.***

Thank you for sharing with me some ways I can pray for each of you. I promise I will pray for you this week. Always feel free to share with me how I can pray for you. God is faithful, and we can trust Him with any problem, fear, worry, or joy we have!

Option: Review the gospel with boys and girls. Explain that kids are welcome to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions.

### **Journal and prayer (5 minutes)**

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas. Then pray, acknowledging God's faithfulness and love.

As time allows, lead kids to complete "The Long Way Back" on the activity page. Kids should use the key to decode the special message.

- pencils
- Journal Page
- "The Long Way Back" activity 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.