

## God Brought His People Home

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Ezra 1:1–2:2; 2:64–3:13

**MAIN POINT:** God brought the Israelites back home.

**KEY PASSAGE:** Daniel 2:20

**BIG PICTURE QUESTION:** How can we obey God? We trust God to help us obey Him.

### SMALL GROUP OPENING

(15–20 MINUTES)

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### LARGE GROUP BIBLE STUDY

(10–15 MINUTES)

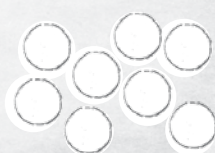
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### SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

(20–25 MINUTES)

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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 70 years" (Jer. 25:11). Then the Lord said, "When 70 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, overthrew 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 preschoolers 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.



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# The BIBLE STORY

## God Brought His People Home

*Ezra 1:1–2:2; 2:64–3:13*

**God's people were in Babylon**, far away from their homes and land. But God had made a promise. Through Jeremiah the prophet, **God said that the people would have to stay in Babylon for 70 years, but then He would bring His people back home.** God always keeps His promises.

Time went by. The children of God's people grew up. They had families and children of their own. Then their children grew up and had families and children too. **When 70 years had passed, God kept His promise.**

King Cyrus was **the king of Babylon**. God gave Cyrus the idea to make a new rule. Everyone had to obey it. Cyrus said, **“Let God's people go back to their land. Let them rebuild God's temple in Jerusalem.”**

This was good news! Before, **God's people** had to stay in Babylon like prisoners. Now they **were free!** They could finally go home. So the people got ready to go. King Cyrus and the other people living in Babylon gave them gifts like gold, silver, and animals.

**God's people started walking.** A man named Zerubbabel (zuh RUHB uh buhl) led them. **They walked and walked and walked. Some of the people had never seen Jerusalem because they had been born in Babylon. When they got to Judah, each family set up its house. Then the people met together in Jerusalem to start rebuilding God's temple.**

**God had special laws for how to build the temple, and God's people were careful to obey them. The priests made the altar in the same place the old altar had been.**

## Then they made offerings and sacrifices to God.

**The people started building.** First, they needed money to buy supplies. God's people gave money to the men in charge of building the temple. They paid people to bring big logs to Jerusalem. **The workers made the foundation, or the bottom, of the temple.** The foundation was very important. A strong foundation makes a building strong.

**The people were so happy that the foundation was done! The priests put on special clothes. The people shouted and sang songs to God. "God is good! He is loving and always will be!" they said.** What a happy day for God's people.

Not everyone was happy though. **Some of the older people remembered what the first temple had looked like long ago, before it had been knocked down. The people were sad, and they cried loudly. The sounds of people shouting and crying was so loud that it could be heard far away.**

*Christ Connection: God sent His people home to fix the temple. God sent Jesus to earth to save His people. One day, Jesus will come back. He will fix up a greater home for all of God's people, and we will live with Him forever.*



**WANT TO  
DISCOVER  
GOD'S WORD?  
GET  
MORE!**

Invite preschoolers to check out this week's devotionals to discover God told His people to obey Him or face exile. (Deut. 27:10) When they repented, God brought them home. Later God sent Jesus to bring us to Him. (1 Pet. 3:18) Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out [www.lifeway.com/devotionals](http://www.lifeway.com/devotionals).

# Small Group OPENING

**SESSION TITLE:** God Brought His People Home

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Ezra 1:1–2:2; 2:64–3:13

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**BIG PICTURE QUESTION:** How can we obey God? We trust God to help us obey Him.

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## Welcome time

- “It Is Well” song
- offering basket
- Allergy Alert download
- favorite toys related to the Bible story theme

Play the unit theme song in the background as you greet preschoolers and follow your church’s security procedures. Set an offering basket near the door to collect at an appropriate time. Post an allergy alert, if necessary. Set out a few favorite theme-related toys, such as puzzles and blocks.

## Activity page

- “Get God’s People Home” activity page, 1 per child
- pencils or crayons

Invite preschoolers to complete the maze to get God’s people to Jerusalem.

**SAY** • God’s people were in Babylon, far away from their homes and land. But God had made a promise. Through Jeremiah the prophet, God said that the people would have to stay in Babylon for 70 years, but then He would bring His people back home. In today’s Bible story, God kept His promise!

## Make rules

Invite preschoolers to make up their own rules. Make up your some of your own silly rules to get preschoolers thinking. Examples of rules include “Eat pizza at every meal,” “Shake each other’s feet to say hello,” “Wear your



clothes backward on Saturdays.”

**SAY** • In today’s Bible story, God’s people were not living in their own land. They were living in Babylon like prisoners. God gave the new king of Babylon an idea to make a new rule. This new rule was good news for God’s people! Listen to our Bible story to find out what the new rule was. Everyone had to obey it!

## Play a walking game

Write the numbers 1-10 on separate sheets of construction paper. Use more or less numbers based on the size of your group. Place the numbered sheets in a circle on the floor and secure with tape. Cut one sheet of construction paper into 10 pieces and label each with a number 1-10. Place the numbered pieces in a basket or bag.

Invite preschoolers to walk around the circle, stepping on one sheet of paper at a time as music plays. When the music stops, draw a number from the bag. The child standing on the number you drew gets to stop the music and draw the number in the next round. Continue playing as time allows.

**SAY** • Did you have fun walking? In our Bible story today, God’s people walked, and they walked, and they walked. They walked for a really long time. Listen to the Bible story to find out where they were going.

## Transition to Bible study

To gain the attention of all the preschoolers to move them to Bible study, show the countdown video, flip off the lights, or clap a simple rhythm for the children to copy. Invite preschoolers to walk a lap around the room before moving to Bible study.

- construction paper
- tape
- scissors
- marker
- small basket or bag
- “It Is Well” song (optional)

- countdown video (optional)

# Large Group LEADER

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## Introduce the Bible story

**SAY** • Can you think of a time when you just wanted to go home? In today's Bible story, God's people had been away from Jerusalem for a very long time, but the time had come to go home.

## Watch or tell the Bible story

Place a bookmark at Ezra in your Bible. Invite a preschooler to open it. Reverently display the open Bible.

**SAY** • The Bible is God's Word. The Bible is a true book. Everything in the Bible really happened! Today's Bible story comes from the Book of Ezra.

Show the Bible story video "God Brought His People Home" or tell the Bible story in your own words using the script provided. Use the bolded version for younger preschoolers.

## Talk about the Bible story

**SAY** • After many years in Babylon, **God brought the Israelites back home.** God sent His people home to fix the temple. God sent Jesus to earth to save His people. One day, Jesus will come back. He will fix up

- bookmark
- Bible
- "God Brought His People Home" video
- Bible Story Picture Poster

- Main Point Poster
- Giant Timeline or Big Story Circle

a greater home for all of God's people, and we will live with Him forever.

Point to the Bible story picture on the giant timeline or big story circle as you ask the following review questions:

1. Where did God's people live for 70 years? (*Babylon*)
2. Who said God's people could go back to their land? (*Cyrus, the new king of Babylon*)
3. What part of the temple did the people build first? (*the foundation*)
4. How did the people celebrate that the foundation was done? (*The priests put on special clothes. The people shouted and sang songs to God.*)
5. Why were some of the older people sad? (*They remembered what the first temple looked like.*)

## Learn the big picture question

**SAY** • Our big picture question is, *How can we obey God? We trust God to help us obey Him.* God wanted His people to rebuild the temple, and He made a way for them to do it! Any time God asks us to do something, we can trust Him to help us do it.

• Big Picture Question Poster

## Practice the key passage

Open your Bible to Daniel 2:20. Read the key passage aloud several times. Sing together the key passage song, "Forever and Ever."

• Key Passage Poster  
• "Forever and Ever" song

**SAY** • God brought His people home just like He promised them, and they worshiped Him. God's name will be praised forever and ever because, just as our key passage tells us, wisdom and power belong to Him.

## Transition to small groups



# Small Group ACTIVITIES

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## Play “Follow Zerubbabel”

Play follow-the-leader according to the traditional rules, but refer to the leader as *Zerubbabel*. Let preschoolers take turns being *Zerubbabel*.

**SAY** • A man named Zerubbabel led God’s people as they walked to Judah. **God brought the Israelites back home.** God sent His people home to fix the temple. God sent Jesus to earth to save His people.

One day, Jesus will come back. He will fix up a greater home for all of God’s people, and we will live with Him forever.

## Create a city scene

- construction paper
- scissors
- glue sticks
- marker

Before the session, cut out rectangles of various sizes from construction paper to serve as buildings. Cut out smaller rectangles to serve as windows. Provide each preschooler with a sheet of construction paper. Invite preschoolers to arrange and glue the rectangles on their paper to create a city scene. Write the main point on each preschooler’s artwork.

**SAY** • **God brought the Israelites back home** to the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a special city that God gave

His people. One day, Jesus will come back. He will fix up a greater home for all of God's people. We will live with God where we will worship Him forever.

## Build on different foundations

Invite preschoolers to experiment building with blocks on different surfaces. Provide hard surfaces like a book, table, or shelf. Provide soft surfaces like a pillow, carpet square, or foam mat. Provide uneven surfaces like an upside down bin, a chair seat, or a three-ring binder. Invite preschoolers to predict which foundations will best support their block structures. Then lead preschoolers to build on the different surfaces.

- hard-surfaced items
- soft-surfaced items
- uneven-surfaced items
- blocks

**SAY • God brought the Israelites back home** to fix the temple. The workers made the foundation, or bottom, of the temple. The foundation was very important. A strong foundation makes a building strong. The Israelites wanted the temple to last a long time. Jesus will fix up a home even better than the temple for all of God's people, and the home Jesus builds for us will last forever.

## Play out the end of the Bible story

Set a layer of blocks on the floor to represent the temple foundation. Choose several preschoolers to be *priests* and dress up in robes. Give the *priests* toy trumpets. Give other children toy cymbals. Choose a few other children to be the *older people*. Give the *older people* quilt batting to put on their heads and around their faces to serve as white hair and beards.

- blocks
- toy trumpets
- toy cymbals
- quilt batting

Lead the *priests* to make trumpet sounds, the *older people* to cry loudly, and the rest of the group to bang their

cymbals and shout, “God is good! He is loving and always will be!” Allow other children to take turns being *priests* or *older people* and play again.

**SAY • God brought the Israelites back home.** They celebrated when the foundation of the temple was finished. Some people were sad because they remembered the old temple. The sounds of people shouting and crying was so loud that it could be heard far away.

One day, Jesus will come back for His people. He will fix up a greater home for all of us, and we will live with Him forever. That will be the happiest day of ever!

## Work “foundation” puzzles

Cut foam sheets into five or six pieces to create a puzzle. Use different colored sheets of foam to create multiple puzzles. Invite preschoolers to reassemble the foam pieces to form a rectangle, or foundation, shape.

**SAY • God brought the Israelites back home** to fix the temple. The day the foundation was done was a happy day for God’s people. God sent Jesus to earth to save His people.

One day, Jesus will come back. That will be the happiest day of all for every one of God’s people. Jesus will fix up a greater home for us, and we will live with Him forever.

- foam sheets
- scissors

## Snack

Play the countdown video to signal the end of activities. Guide preschoolers to clean their areas. Take a restroom break and wash hands. Gather preschoolers for snack time. Thank God for the snack.

Serve graham crackers for snack. Lead preschoolers to stack the crackers to create a foundation. Explain to preschoolers that the temple was the place where God met with His people. Jesus came to earth to rescue God's people from sin. One day, Jesus will come back. He will fix up a greater home for all of God's people, and we will live with Him forever.

- countdown video (optional)
- Allergy Alert download
- snack food
- paper cups and napkins

## Transition

When a child finishes her snack, guide her to throw away any trash. She may select a book or puzzle to examine, play quietly with play dough or a favorite toy, or color the Bible story coloring page.

Offer the journal page and invite preschoolers to draw a picture of the most beautiful home they can imagine. Remind them that **God brought the Israelites back home**, and one day we will get to live in the home Jesus is preparing for us. Our home with Jesus will be better than anything we can imagine. Pray for the children.

**SAY** • God, You always keep Your promises. You brought Your people back home just as You promised. Thank You that You promise to send Jesus back for us and we will get to live with You forever. Amen.

If parents are picking up their children at this time, tell them something that their child enjoyed doing or did well during the session. Distribute the preschool big picture cards for families.

- books
- puzzles
- play dough
- Journal Page printable, 1 per child
- Bible Story Coloring Page
- crayons
- *Big Picture Cards for Families: Babies, Toddlers, and Preschoolers*