

## God Brought His People Home

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

**MAIN POINT:** God changed the king's heart so the Israelites could go home.

**KEY PASSAGE:** Daniel 2:20-21

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

**SMALL GROUP OPENING**  
(10–15 MINUTES)

**PAGE 58**



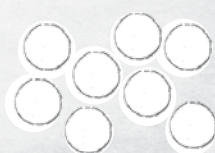
**LARGE GROUP BIBLE STUDY**  
(25–30 MINUTES)

**PAGE 60**



**SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES**  
(25–30 MINUTES)

**PAGE 66**



4

### 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 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.



**MINISTRY GRID**  
training made simple

Additional resources for each session are available at [gospelproject.com](http://gospelproject.com). For free training and session-by-session help, visit [www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject](http://www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject).

## God Brought His People Home

*Ezra 1:1–2:2; 2:64–3:13*

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 stonemasons 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.*



**WANT TO  
DISCOVER  
GOD’S WORD?  
GET  
ADVENTURE!**

Invite kids 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

**MAIN POINT:** God changed the king’s heart so the Israelites could go home.

**KEY PASSAGE:** Daniel 2:20-21

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

---

## 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 about the longest amount of time they have ever been away from home, or out of school. Talk to them about how it felt to go back after a long time away.

**SAY** • God’s people had been living in Babylon, away from their land and homes, for many years. But God had promised to send them home.

## Activity page (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the “Builder’s Bag” activity page. Ask them to look at the pictures to circle which materials a builder might use. They should draw a line between items that are used together.

**SAY** • One of the first things God’s people wanted to do when they returned home was rebuild God’s temple. Why do you think that was important to them? Do you think they were successful?

- “Builder’s Bag” activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

## Session starter (10 minutes)

### OPTION 1: The long road home

Use tape or string to mark out an obstacle course that the kids should follow. It could go over chairs, under tables, around objects, and so forth. You may use a stopwatch to see who can complete the course fastest.

- tape or string
- tables (optional)
- chairs (optional)
- stopwatch (optional)

**SAY** • God’s people had been living away from their land for many years. Today, we will learn how they ended up going home!

### OPTION 2: Ha-ha, boo-hoo

Invite the kids to sit in a circle. Choose a kid to go first. She must say “ha” as seriously as possible. The kid to her left must then say “ha” twice, the kid to his left three times, and so on, around the circle. After the *has* have passed all the way around at least once, kids may choose to instead say “boo” which switches the direction of turn passing, and starts the counting back over at one. The kid to the right of the one who said “boo” will say “boo-hoo,” and to her right will say “boo-hoo-hoo” and so on. After at least three kids have followed this pattern, a kid may choose to say “ha” again, which resets the game to its original pattern. Kids continue passing the laugh or cry around the circle, choosing to reverse the direction whenever they desire.

**SAY** • In today’s story, God’s people finally get to go home.

At the end of the story, some of the people cheered, and some cried. What do you think could cause two such different reactions from one group of people?



## Transition to large group

# Large Group LEADER

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

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

**MAIN POINT:** God changed the king’s heart so the Israelites could go home.

**KEY PASSAGE:** Daniel 2:20-21

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

---

## Countdown

• countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as large group time begins.

## Introduce the session (3 minutes)

• leader attire  
• photo album

*[Large Group Leader enters wearing an apron and chef’s hat, carrying a photo album.]*

**LEADER** • Hey, everyone, welcome back! I’ve got some great news for you all! My restaurant has started winning back some of the old customers! I found this photo album in the back. It’s filled with pictures of customers who used to come here all the time when Papa Roni was the owner. Apparently as things fell apart, many of these fine people stopped coming.

However, yesterday, I saw a guy come in whose picture is in the album! I started talking to him and he told me that back then the food wasn’t as good and the wait staff was always grumpy and rude. But he had heard I was making changes and decided to give it a try again! He said the cheesy bread is the best it’s ever been!

I’m going to update this photo album to start

keeping track of our loyal customers again. Then we can thank them for supporting Papa Roni's pizza!

You know, this actually reminds me of our Bible story this week! Who would have imagined that a pizza restaurant could keep pointing me back to God's Word like this? I sure am glad I bought this place.

## Giant timeline (1 minute)

**LEADER** • As you know, God's people had been living in exile. They were not living in the land God had given to their ancestors long ago; that's why Daniel and the other men we've learned about had to deal with the kings of Babylon and Persia. But God is in control.

This week our story is called "God Brought His People Home." That's right! Just like our customers have started coming back, we will learn how God's people finally got to go home!

• Giant Timeline

## Big picture question (1 minute)

**LEADER** • But first, let's remember our big picture question and answer. *How can we obey God?* [Allow kids to respond.] Right! *We trust God to give us strength to obey Him.*

## Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Ezra 1:1–2:2; 2:64–3:13. Tell the Bible story in your own words, or show the Bible story video "God Brought His People Home."

**LEADER** • Goodness gracious! What an incredible tale of God's faithfulness and power. God's people had been living in exile for 70 years! But when the time

• Bibles  
• "God Brought His People Home" video  
• Big Picture Question Poster  
• Bible Story Picture Poster



was right, **God changed the king's heart so the Israelites could go home.** Zerubbabel led God's people back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The temple was the place where God met with His people on earth.

When the people returned, they felt different emotions. Some of them were happy to finally be back in the land God had given them. Some were sad because they remembered what the temple used to be like. But all of them were learning to trust God and obey Him.

***How can we obey God? We trust God to give us strength to obey Him.*** Jesus came to earth to rescue people from sin. One day, Jesus will return to restore a greater home for all of God's people, and we will spend eternity with Him. The difference is that when Jesus returns, all the changes will be good ones, and He will take our sadness away! No one will cry when Jesus restores the world because it will be perfect.

Ask the following questions:

1. Which king of Persia let God's people return home?  
(*Cyrus, Ezra 1:1*)
2. Who led God's people back to their land?  
(*Zerubbabel, Ezra 2:2*)
3. What did the people do first? (*built the altar and restored sacrifices, Ezra 3:2-3*)
4. When the foundation of the temple was complete, how did the people react? (*Some were joyful, but some were sad; Ezra 3:11-12*)
5. ***How can we obey God? We trust God to give us strength to obey Him.***

## The Gospel: God's Plan for Me (optional)

Use Scripture and the guide provided with this session to explain to boys and girls how to become a Christian. Assign individuals to meet with kids who have more questions.

Encourage boys and girls to ask their parents, small group leaders, or other Christian adults any questions they may have about becoming a Christian.

Tip: Provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

### Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Daniel 2:20-21.

- Key Passage Poster
- "Name of God" song

**LEADER** • Many years ago, God spoke through His prophet Jeremiah. God told Jeremiah that the people of Israel would be exiled and serve another king for 70 years, but God also promised that He would bring His people home. God is good, and He always keeps His promises. He was faithful to His people.

Our key passage says that God is wise and powerful. God changes times and seasons. He removes kings and allows new kings to be in charge. He gives wisdom and understanding to His people. God is worthy of our praise! Let's sing.

Lead boys and girls to sing "Name of God."

### Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

**LEADER** • God's people probably felt very excited to finally return to their land. Have you ever been away from home for a long time? How did you feel when you got to return home? Watch this video!

- "Unit 16, Session 4" discussion starter video

Show the "Unit 16, Session 4" discussion starter video. Discuss with kids what things help us feel comfortable at home. Discuss reasons we long to be home when we are

away for a long time.

**LEADER** • God’s people were longing to go home, just like the kid in the video! But the whole world is currently broken by sin. That means that for now, nowhere on earth is our true home. However, Jesus will return someday and fix the world, and our true home forever will be with Him! That is a home that we can be excited to get to!

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

• “It Is Well” song

**LEADER** • Our God is good and faithful. He gives His people strength to obey. Let’s praise Him now! Sing together “It Is Well.”

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

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

**LEADER** • God, thank You for showing Your goodness to Your people in exile. You changed the heart of the king so that Your people could go home. You gave them strength to obey You. Thank You for sending Jesus and giving us strength to obey You too. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

### **Dismiss to small groups**

## 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.

# Small Group LEADER

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

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

**MAIN POINT:** God changed the king’s heart so the Israelites could go home.

**KEY PASSAGE:** Daniel 2:20-21

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

---

- Key Passage Poster
- dry erase board or chalkboard
- markers or chalk
- eraser
- “Name of God” song (optional)

## Key passage activity (5 minutes)

Draw a simple church shape on a dry erase board or chalkboard (a square with a triangle roof and cross on top). Make blanks for each letter in each word of the key passage. Allow the kids to take turns guessing letters to fill in the blanks. As kids guess incorrect letters, erase a line from the church drawing. For each word the kids complete, add a line that was erased. When all the blanks are filled, read the verses with your kids. Then sing the key passage song.

**SAY** • This key passage reminds us that God is in control of everything—even of kings! God used Cyrus, a Persian king, to get His people back to the land God had exiled them from.

## Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

Distribute a Bible to each kid. Help kids find Ezra 1:1–2:2; 2:64–3:13. Ask the following questions, tossing a colored ball to kids whom you would like to answer. If the kid does not know the answer, direct him to Scripture to find the answer. If he still cannot answer, he may toss the ball to a friend who does know. Then kids will toss the ball back to the leader for the next question.

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- colored ball

### Questions:

1. During which year of Cyrus's reign did God send His people home? (*the first year, Ezra 1:1*)
2. Who got ready to go home? (*the leaders of Judah and Benjamin, the priests, and the Levites; Ezra 1:5*)
3. What did the people donate when they arrived at the site of the temple? (*gold, silver, and priest clothes; Ezra 2:69*)
4. What did the people start rebuilding first? (*the altar, Ezra 3:1-3*)
5. Why did some people shout for joy when the foundation of the temple was laid? (*They were happy to be home in Jerusalem and were praising God for His goodness, Ezra 3:11*)
6. Why did others cry at this same event? (*They remembered the first temple and were sad that it had been destroyed, Ezra 3:12*)

**SAY** • God never stopped loving His people, even while they were in exile. He promised to bring them home, and that is exactly what He did. Jesus also promised to come back and take those who trust in Him home to be with Him. We don't know when that day will happen, but we can trust in God's promises. We know that Jesus will return for us, and our shouts of joy will not be mixed with any cries of sadness.

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

## Activity choice (10 minutes)

### OPTION 1: Remnant tag

Invite the kids to play tag. Choose a kid to be *It*, and instruct him that the kids he tags will be out. Secretly determine a qualification that allows some kids to stay in even if they are tagged (wearing red shirts, wearing shorts,



wearing mismatched socks, and so forth).

Watch the game and whenever a kid in that group is tagged, tell her that she is not out. When the secret kids are the ones left, see if the class can guess what they all have in common.

**SAY • God changed the king’s heart so the Israelites**

**could go home.** God promised to preserve a remnant of His people, even through the exile. He brought those people home when others did not get to go home. Jesus promised to return to bring His followers home, and we know that those who trust in Jesus will be saved! We don’t have to wonder if we are part of God’s family, we can pray for Jesus to save us and be certain!

**OPTION 2: I’d never live there!**

Provide paper, markers, crayons, and pencils for the kids. Ask them to design a home that they would never want to live in. You may choose to offer other art supplies for kids to “clutter” their home. Allow volunteers to share their designs and explain the different features their awful homes would have that make them so bad. Then provide building blocks and allow them to build their designs.

**SAY • God changed the king’s heart so the Israelites**

**could go home.** God was faithful to bring them back to their land, but the world was still broken by sin. Even the land God promised them was not perfect.

The world is broken by sin even today. Thankfully, Jesus promised to prepare a place for us to live with God forever. One day, Jesus will return to gather everyone who believes in Him together and restore

- paper
- markers, crayons, or pencils
- art supplies (optional)
- building blocks

Note: Be sensitive to children who are in foster care, group homes, or come from difficult home situations.

the earth to make it perfect and beautiful again. We will live with God on the new earth, which will be our perfect home forever. No matter how good we might think our homes are right now, they are they are nothing compared to what Jesus will restore when He returns. Jesus will fix everything broken about the world and destroy everything evil.

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

Distribute each child's journal. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture showing a promise God has made that they sometimes struggle to believe. Ask them to think about how we can know that God's promises always come true.

**SAY** • Sometimes we might feel very far from God. It can be easy for us to forget some of His promises or wonder when He will carry them out. God's timing is different from our timing, but we can look back and see all of His wonderful promises. He has always kept His promises to us, and we know that He always will.

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray, thanking God for His faithfulness to us even though we struggle to be faithful to Him. Ask Him for strength to obey Him and trust in His promises. Praise Him that Jesus will return, and ask Him to hasten that day.

- pencils and crayons
- Journal Page
- 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.