



# God Moves the Jews to Restore Worship

*Ezra 1–6*



## LESSON GOAL

Students will recognize the blessing of worshipping God and will submit their hearts in worship.

## BIBLE TRUTHS

- God kept His promise to return the Jews to the Promised Land.
- The people joyfully worshiped God.
- God moved the hearts of the king and the people to bring about His plan.

## KEY VERSE

“Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy” (Ezra 6:16).

## APPLICATION

- Repent from self worship and follow Christ.
- Worship God with a joyful heart.
- Thank God for His providence.
- Love God because He is merciful.

## NEXT WEEK

God Reveals His Goodness to the Jews  
Read Ezra 7–10.

### Symbol Key



Craft



Finger Play



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Center



Activity



Q & A



Age Group



## PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

*“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul.... You shall teach them to your children” (Deuteronomy 11:18–19).*

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here to aid you in understanding the Scripture.

### Bible Background

#### Introduction

In Jeremiah 29:10, the Lord promised Israel, “After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place.” What a precious promise! Even though Israel had been incredibly wicked, God was having mercy on them. He not only preserved them while they were exiled in Babylon, but He also promised to bring them back to the Promised Land.

Although this promise would have been precious to many Jews, it is difficult to imagine anyone cherishing it more than Daniel. Daniel left Israel as a young teenager in 605 B.C. and spent the next 70 years in Babylon. When the 70 years of Israel’s punishment were coming to a close, Daniel was prompted by the Lord’s promise in Jeremiah to confess the sins of Israel, to admit that Israel deserved nothing from God except punishment, and to ask God to have mercy on His people (Dan. 9:1–19). The Lord’s promise in Jeremiah led Daniel to pray that God would glorify His name by keeping His promise, returning His people to the Promised Land.

God did keep His promise. The book of Ezra begins by recording the Israelites’ first return to the Promised Land, “in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia” (538 B.C.) in order “that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled” (Ezra 1:1). The first six chapters of Ezra record what happened during and after this first return. Although the events took place long before the historian Ezra’s lifetime, God’s appointed Ezra to record how He providentially restored worship in Jerusalem through the rebuilding of the temple. The reinstatement of temple worship is an exciting reminder of the blessing and necessity of submitting in worship to God.

#### Worship Initiated through God’s Providence (Ezra 1:1–2:70)

Whenever God makes a promise, He has the power to fulfill it. When He promised that He would bring about the restoration of temple worship, He directed the hearts of both pagan kings and Jewish exiles to bring it about. In Ezra 1:1, God “stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia.” In response to God’s prompting, Cyrus announced that he had been commanded by God “to build Him a house at Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:2). He gave permission for any willing Jews to go to Jerusalem to build the temple and told the Jews who chose to remain in Babylon to give silver, gold, goods, and livestock to help with the effort. The Lord so moved Cyrus’s heart that he even gave back 5,400 gold and silver articles that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem (1:7–11). The Lord also moved the hearts of the Israelites to leave their Babylonian homes (1:5). And when the Jews left Babylon for Jerusalem, the Lord worked in their neighbors’ hearts so that they gave them of their wealth (1:6), similar to how the Egyptians gave their wealth to Israel when they left Egypt (Ex. 12:35–36).

While Ezra 2 may not be initially interesting to modern readers, the list of returnees to Jerusalem is an amazing testimony to God's grace and wisdom. The Lord brought to Jerusalem an assembly of 42,360 people (Ezra 2:64)! He had chosen to preserve His people, His word, and the Davidic line of His promised Messiah by bringing back these people. Although none of the returnees deserved the blessing, each had been chosen by God and prompted to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Each name and number is a testimony to God's faithfulness to His people. God's wisdom is also seen in His provision of leaders for the people (Ezra 2:2; including Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, and Jeshua, a priest in the line of Phinehas), priests (2:36–39), Levites (2:40), temple singers (2:41), gatekeepers (2:42), temple servants (2:43–54), and Solomon's servants (2:55–58). The Lord not only provided the materials for the temple, but also brought enough men to work in and support the temple! He was graciously directing all events so that He would be glorified in the people's worship.

### **Worship Begun According to God's Requirement (Ezra 3:1–13)**

After settling in their cities (Ezra 2:70), the Israelites gathered at the beginning of the seventh month (3:1). For the first time since leaving Jerusalem, they were able to worship as God had required "in the Law of Moses the man of God" (3:2). Even though the Israelites could not offer sacrifices while in exile, they had been able to confess their sins and be forgiven because of their faith in God. But now they could express that faith by obediently offering the sacrifices that God required. After building an altar, the people offered both required and freewill offerings (3:3, 5) and celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles (3:4). Because of God's grace, the people were able to come before God as He had directed.

Having obeyed God's commands as explicitly stated in the Law, the people then began building the temple. After first hiring masons and carpenters and acquiring cedar logs from Lebanon, the people began work on the temple "in the second month of the second year" (April/May 536 B.C.; Ezra 3:8–9). In God's faithfulness, the first major step in construction, the laying of the foundation, was completed (3:10). The people demonstrated right hearts before the Lord by worshipfully celebrating the laying of the foundation. In a powerful scene, "the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel" (Ezra 3:10). They gave thanks to the Lord and sang, "For He is good, for His mercy endures forever toward Israel" (3:11). While many of the people shouted for joy because of God's mercy, others who were old enough to remember Solomon's temple wept as they remembered what had been lost (3:11–13). Israel had been restored to the land, but their sins had left shameful scars. Although temple construction was just beginning, the people were able to worship God for His mercy.

### **Worship Opposed by God's Enemies (Ezra 4:1–24)**

Even before beginning temple construction, Israel feared the surrounding people (Ezra 3:3), people who no doubt felt threatened by the Jews' government-sanctioned return to the Promised Land. These people included the Samaritans, a race that resulted from the intermarriage of northern Israelites and pagans whom the Assyrians forced to settle in northern Israel (4:2). While actually being "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" (4:1), these Samaritans pretended to be on the Israelites' side and offered to help build the temple. They told the Israelites, "We seek your God as you do" (4:2), but really they worshiped a multitude of gods. Their proposal may have sounded good, but the Israelites knew better than to take them at their word. Wisely, they rejected the proposal (4:3).

The true nature of the Samaritans' worship soon became obvious. Having been spurned by the Israelites, "the people of the land tried to discourage the people of

Judah” (Ezra 4:4). They tried to prevent the temple from being built and even “hired counselors against them,” perhaps Persian officials who would make building the temple difficult (4:5). The Samaritans’ line in the sand was the construction of the temple. Their plan worked; temple construction was abandoned until the second year of the reign of Darius I (520 B.C.; 4:24).

The opposition recorded in Ezra 4:6–23 did not take place during the construction of the temple. Instead, it took place during the lifetimes of Ezra, Esther, and Nehemiah. Ezra 4:6 records that the Samaritan opposition continued during the reign of Persian emperor Ahasuerus, who reigned 486–464 B.C. Ezra 4:7–23 records the Samaritans’ successful attempt to persuade Artaxerxes (who reigned 464–423 B.C.) to stop the rebuilding of Jerusalem. These examples are included to show that although the Samaritans’ offer to help build the temple sounded good, the Samaritans were adversaries of Israel.

### **Worship Resumed by God’s Servants (Ezra 5:1–6:12)**

Temple construction had begun strongly, but the foundation languished for 16 years because the people capitulated before the Samaritan opposition. In His patience, God sent Haggai and Zechariah to proclaim that the people needed to continue constructing the temple (Ezra 5:1). The leaders, Zerubbabel and Jeshua (called the high priest in Haggai 2:2), obeyed God and led the people in construction. Two prophets, a descendant of David, and the high priest all worked together to finish the temple (5:2).

Sixteen years had passed since the Jews had stopped building the temple. During that period, Cyrus and his son Cambyses both had died, and the great Persian king Darius had begun to reign. Naturally, Darius’s officials were suspicious of the starting of such a nationalistic project and questioned the Jews concerning the construction (Ezra 5:3–5). After hearing the Jews’ story, the officials sent a letter to Darius, asking him to verify whether King Cyrus had commissioned the construction of the temple (5:6–17). The letter reported how the temple construction “goes on diligently and prospers in their hands” (5:8). In His goodness, “the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they could not make them cease till a report could go to Darius” (5:5). Although the officials were waiting for permission, God ensured that the construction continued.

The Israelites were not the only servants of God. Whether Darius knew it or not, he also served God with his answer. Not only did he find the record of Cyrus’s decree (Ezra 6:2–5), but he also commanded that the officials stay far away from the temple and “let the work of this house of God alone” (6:7). Darius went even further than Cyrus and commanded that the “cost be paid at the king’s expense” from taxes, and that “whatever they need—young bulls, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil—let it be given them day by day” (6:8–9). Darius even pronounced capital punishment for anyone who interfered with the building, and cursed by the God of Israel anyone who opposed the temple (6:11–12). The Lord again had moved a king’s heart to accomplish His purpose.

### **Worship Enjoyed by God’s People (Ezra 6:13–22)**

Finally, in the 12th month of 515 B.C., the temple was completed. The Lord had accomplished His work with the world’s most powerful kings and their governing officials, a number of elders, two prophets, and the rest of the Jews (Ezra 6:13–15). The people had obeyed the commandment of the God of Israel. All the Israelites who had returned from exile assembled to celebrate “the dedication of this house of God with joy” and to offer sacrifices before the Lord (6:16–17).

The celebration continued the next month as the people assembled for Passover (Ezra 6:19). The Jews who had returned from exile were joined by the Jews who had remained in the land and who now “separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the LORD God of Israel” (6:21). Passover was followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Jews kept the feast “with joy; for the LORD made them joyful” (6:22). God had used the king of Assyria (one of the many titles of the Persian kings) “to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel” (6:22). The Lord had mercy on His people and again allowed them to worship at the temple. Indeed, the Lord had made His worshipers joyful!

### Conclusion

While God is worthy of all worship, worship is also a blessing given from God. If God did not work in the hearts of His saints, they would not delight in His worship. But God’s mercy is so great that He breaks those who hate the thought of worship and changes them so that they love to worship Him. Worship must be preceded by sacrifice. The Jews began their worship in Jerusalem with sacrifice, but the sacrifice for the New Testament believers has already been offered. By the grace of God, believers are able to come before Him because of the sacrifice of His Son. The end result of Christ’s sacrifice is that believers worship God forever. He gave Himself for the glory of the Father. Although believers face internal and external opposition as they worship God, He strengthens those who are His through His Word so that they joyfully worship Him.

## POINT TO THE TRUTH

*“Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth”  
(Psalm 78:1).*

This section includes questions to review last week’s lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week’s lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



### What Would You Have Packed?

Today’s lesson begins by describing how Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. For the Jews, moving from Babylon to Jerusalem would have required much faith and hope in God. Help the students to create a packing list, writing down things that the Jews might have packed for their trip from Babylon to Jerusalem.



### Working Together

Designate various students as kings, Israelites, or enemies. They can be identified with stickers (crowns, smiley faces, and sad faces) or props (paper crowns, smiley-face masks, and sad-face masks). Work on a project together—perhaps a puzzle, a relay race, or building a temple with blocks. Emphasize to the students that the point is not “We can do it if we work together,” but rather “God uses various people to work together to accomplish His will.”



### Who Returned to Jerusalem?

Ezra 2 is a testimony to God’s faithfulness in bringing the Jews back to Jerusalem. Before class, create a scroll with Ezra 2:1 written at the top. As each student enters

the classroom, have a teacher or helper read the verse to him and write his name on the scroll. (You could have someone come in and write the students' names in calligraphy; the more beautiful the scroll, the more the students will appreciate the activity.) Once class begins, read the entire scroll, and tell the students to imagine what it would have been like to be one of the Jews returning to Jerusalem. In today's lesson they will learn about how God graciously allowed a list like this to be recorded in His Word.



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### Worship Puzzle

Write WORSHIP in large letters on a piece of butcher paper. Cut the letters apart, and then cut each letter into several puzzle pieces. The students can assemble the word, and then it can be hung on the wall during the lesson—or each letter could be assembled during the lesson, one at a time, each time God moves a person in the story to do His will.



### Fair Trade?

Give each student a small treat, such as a piece of candy. Then tell them that they have a choice: they can keep what they have, or they can trade it for what you have. (Do not show them what you have.) If they decide to trade, they must do it now, not once they see what it is that you have. Have the students who want to trade stand up. Then give them what you have: twice the amount of whatever they were given at first. Ask the class why they did or didn't trade. Tell them that Israel did not want to give up their good life in favor of an unknown future. In today's lesson we will learn that Israel had to trust God for the unknown.



### What He Says, He Will Do

In Isaiah 46:9–10, God reminds Israel that what sets Him apart from the gods of the nations is that He has revealed from ancient times “things that are not yet done” (46:10). He reveals Himself and His plans through His prophets. Take some time during the lesson to explain that the rebuilding of the temple was the fulfillment of a 70-year-old promise. Ask the students whether they ever have made promises and then not kept them. Have they ever made plans and then had to change them? Have they ever been promised something and then been disappointed when they did not get it? God never breaks a promise or changes His plans. What He says, He will do. Show the students a bag full of treats, and tell them what the treats are and that you will hand them out after the lesson. Then place the bag in a visible position. During the lesson, the students will be waiting expectantly for their promised treats. This is much like the believers in Israel had to respond for God's encouraging prophecies about their restoration.



### Building the Temple

Give the students building blocks, and instruct them to help you build the temple foundation. Pretend to use gold or silver you brought from Babylon to pay lumber men for wood. Measure the blocks with a ruler, and talk about what kind of building it should be. Ask the students, “How do we know how to build it?” Make a point of looking in the Bible to find out how big the temple should be and how many rooms it should have.



### Nature Walk

Take the students on a short nature walk to collect items that might be found on a camping trip. Talk about things that might be seen on a long hike. In today's lesson, the Israelites will go on a long camping trip. Tell the students to listen closely to discover what the Israelites will see.

## PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

*“Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done” (Psalm 78:4).*

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included that you can use to proclaim your worship to God. Use the lesson questions to check the students’ understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use during the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done directly from the Bible.

### Bible Lesson

Ever since their enemies had forced them from the Promised Land 70 years ago, the Israelites had been living in exile, scattered among the nations. This meant that most of the Israelites who ever had lived in the Promised Land had died. The only ones still living were those who had been exiled as children and were now old men and women. Daniel was one of these. He knew, though, that God had promised the Israelites through the prophet Jeremiah that He would return them to their land 70 years after they were exiled. Knowing that the 70 years were nearly over, Daniel prayed to the Lord, confessing the Israelites’ sins and asking God to have mercy on His people. Daniel also prayed that God would glorify His name by keeping His promise to return the Israelites to the Promised Land. God answered Daniel’s prayer and set in motion His plan to bring the Israelites home. He worked in the hearts of both King Cyrus and the Israelites to accomplish this.

King Cyrus of Persia had conquered many nations at this time, and the Israelites who lived in those lands were subject to him. God worked King Cyrus’s heart, and he sent out a message that any Israelites who wanted to could return to the Promised Land and rebuild the temple. He also gave back the gold and silver that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple when he had invaded Jerusalem. The Israelites responded by packing up and heading for home. God worked in the hearts of their neighbors, and they gave the Israelites money and other valuable things to help them get reestablished in their homeland. The number of Israelites who returned to Jerusalem was large; there were more than 42,000 people, including many priests, singers, and servants. These people were needed to help operate the temple according to God’s laws. God had preserved and protected His people even while punishing them for not worshipping Him.

About seven months after returning home, the Israelites gathered in Jerusalem to begin rebuilding the temple. First, they built the altar and offered sacrifices to God for the first time since leaving Jerusalem 70 years before. They continued to offer sacrifices both day and night and were sure to keep God’s laws regarding sacrifices. They also began the process of building the whole temple. They hired carpenters, masons, and other workers to lay the foundation and gather the materials.

Not everyone was happy about the building project, though. There was a large group of people called Samaritans who did not respect the Israelites or their worship of God. They worshiped their own manmade gods. The Samaritans tried various means of keeping the temple from being rebuilt, and their plan worked for a while. The Israelites became discouraged and slowed down the project. In fact, for 16 years, they allowed the Samaritans to keep them from continuing to build. However, God continued to show the Israelites mercy and sent two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to tell them to continue building. The Israelites knew the



prophets were right and restarted the work. They had one more obstacle to overcome, though.

King Cyrus had died, and a new king, Darius, was in charge. The servants of King Darius did not like that the Israelites were building the temple. They feared that Israel would become a great nation again and would threaten Darius's rule over the land. But God was working in King Darius's heart. Darius went back through the records and saw that King Cyrus had given the Israelites permission to build the temple. He honored King Cyrus's orders and even said that he would pay for the building of the temple and would supply the Israelites with the materials they needed. He also said that anyone who got in the Israelites' way would be killed.

The Israelites completed the temple and celebrated with great joy. The Lord's work finally was complete. They continued to celebrate for a month, up to the great assembly for Passover. God had given them not only a proper place for worship, but also joyful hearts and a great desire to worship Him.



## Lesson Questions

How did God keep His promise to Israel?

*In the book of Jeremiah, the Lord promised Israel that He would return them to their home, the Promised Land.*

How did God achieve the rebuilding of the temple?

*God stirred the hearts of the exiles to return and rebuild and the hearts of pagan kings to give materials and money in order that the temple might be built.*

How did the people show their right heart before the Lord?

*The people desired to worship God in the right way. Once they were in their cities, they gathered and worshiped God as He required. Then they began to build the temple.*

What did the people do once the foundation of the temple was built?

*Once the foundation was built, the people joyfully worshiped the Lord.*

Who discouraged the Israelites from building the temple?

*The Samaritans.*

Whom did God send to the people to encourage them to continue building?

*God sent Haggai and Zechariah to tell the people that they needed to continue construction of the temple.*

How did God have mercy on Israel?

*God allowed the people to worship at the temple again.*

## Presentation Ideas



### A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards

Use appropriate A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards with the lesson.



### Betty Lukens Flannelgraph

Use appropriate flannelgraph pieces with the lesson.



## Act It Out

Have the students act out the dramatic scene of the Israelites praising God in Ezra 3:10–13. Select a few students to stand to one side of you, and give them kazoos or party horns. These students represent the priests (3:10). Then select a few students to stand on your other side, and give them cymbals (or tambourines or castanets). These students represent the sons of Asaph (3:10). Divide the rest of the students into two groups. One group should say, “For He is good,” and the other side should then say, “For His mercy endures forever toward Israel” (3:11). The students can practice their parts a few times and then end with a great shout of “Praise the Lord!” while the “priests” and “sons of Asaph” make music with their instruments. If time permits, tell some students to sing as though they are very happy (perhaps a song they will know, such as “Rejoice in the Lord”) and other students to pretend to cry. Do not be surprised if this sounds chaotic; the people in Jerusalem could not tell the shouts of joy from the sounds of weeping, either (3:13). Have the students all return to their seats, and explain to them why some Jews wept while others rejoiced.



## Celebrate the Lord

When you reach the part of the lesson where the Jews praise the Lord, have the students act out the scene. Explain that the Israelites waited 10 years to celebrate the building of the temple. Give the students musical instruments, and tell them that you will count to 10 and then they can play their instruments and sing a praise song (“God Is So Good” or “Praise Him! Praise Him, All Ye Little Children”).

## Praise and Worship

*I Will Call upon the Lord*

*I Stand in Awe*

*As the Deer*



## Rebuilding the Temple

God had promised the Jews they’d return to their land,  
(*Point upward, then outward.*)

And to show that His promise is always fulfilled,  
(*Place hand over heart; nod head.*)

He stirred up the king’s heart to declare that the Jews  
(*Hold hands at head like a crown; cup hands around mouth.*)

Could go back to their land and begin to rebuild.  
(*Point outward; pretend to hammer.*)

So the exiles returned to Jerusalem then,  
(*March in place.*)

And they started the work to rebuild the Lord’s house.  
(*Pretend to hammer, saw, etc.*)

The Samaritans mocked and discouraged their work,  
(*Wag finger mockingly; slump shoulders and frown.*)

But the Lord sent His prophets to say, "Don't stop now!"  
(Cup hands at mouth; shake head.)

So they worked once again, though their enemies scoffed,  
(Pretend to work again.)

And before very long, the foundation was laid.  
(Sweep hands outward to indicate a flat surface.)

All the people rejoiced with a shout of delight.  
(Pump fists joyfully; smile.)

God is faithful to keep every promise He's made!  
(Point upward; nod head.)

## PRACTICE THE TRUTH

"That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (Psalm 78:7).

Choose ideas from this section to review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



### "God Moves People to Accomplish His Will"

Materials: copies of the "God Moves People to Accomplish His Will" craft pages on cardstock, paper clips, magnets, scissors

Directions: Give each student a copy of the craft pages, and instruct him to cut out the character tabs. The students then should fold along the dotted lines and use paper clips to hold the ends together so that each character can stand. Have the students set the characters on the map and use magnets to move the pieces along the dotted line.



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### Build the Temple

Materials: sugar cubes, glue, quarter-sheets of cardstock, copies of the key verse

Directions: Before class, build a temple of your own to determine how many sugar cubes each student will need. You can then bring your temple in as an example for the students to copy. During class, give each student a piece of cardstock and a copy of the key verse. First, the students should glue the key verse at the top of the cardstock. Then they can build their temples. Be sure to allow time for the glue to dry.



### What Can I Do?

The book of Ezra says that God was served and worshiped in the temple by the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants. What were some of the jobs of service to God that these people did? In the body of Christ, we each have a job to do, too. God has given every believer gifts and abilities to do a particular job. Ask the students to name some jobs they can do in service to God now, as well as some jobs they will be able to do as adults.

### **Coloring Pages**

Give each student the coloring sheets from the back of the lesson. Students can color the pages in class or at home.



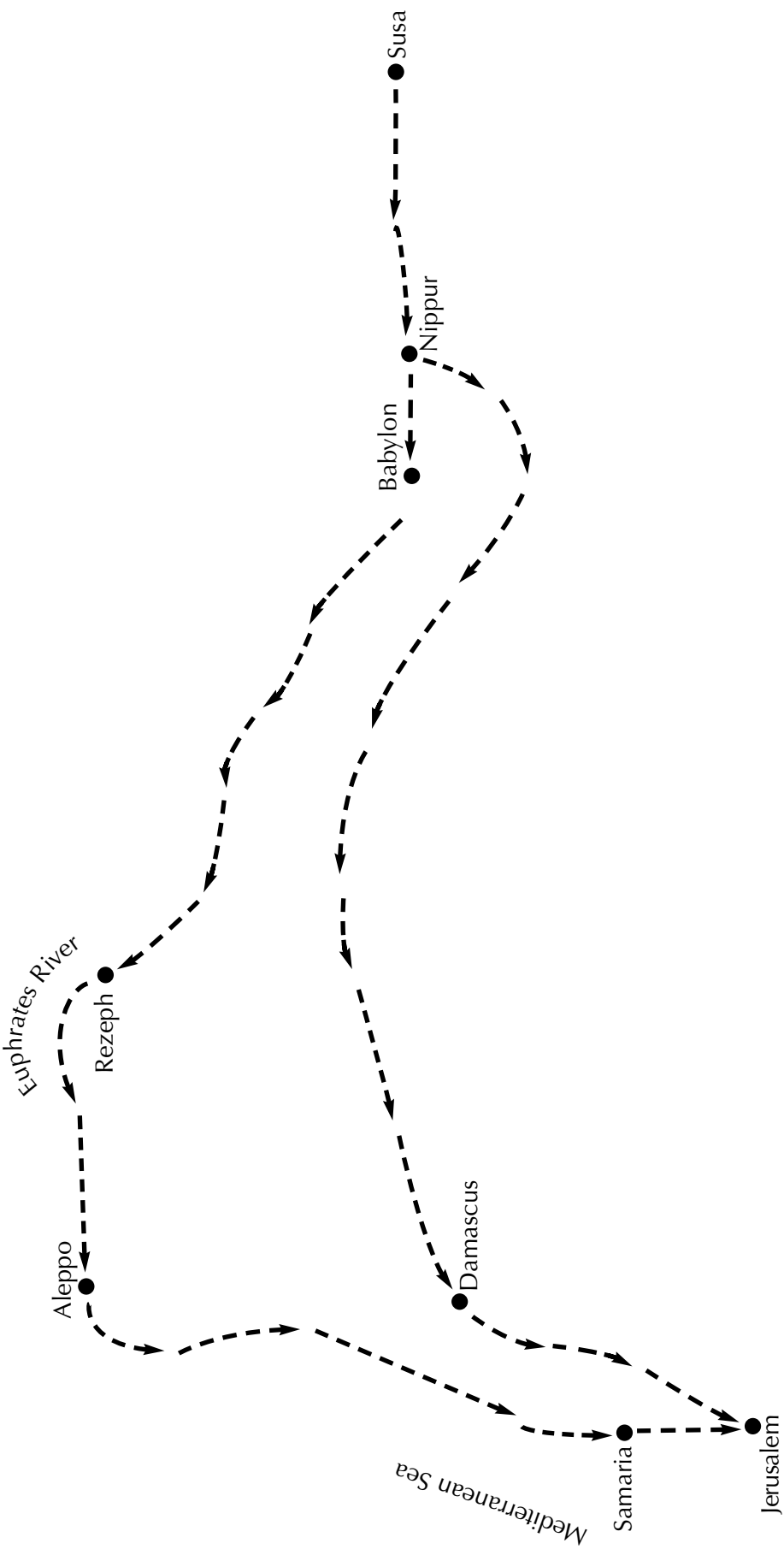
### **MEMORY VERSE**

“He has put a new song in my mouth—Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, And will trust in the LORD” (Psalm 40:3).

# God Moves People to Accomplish His Will

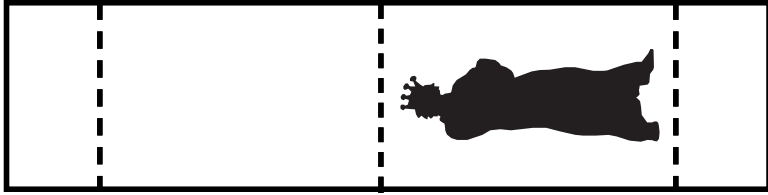
- God moved kings to protect and equip the Jews to rebuild the temple.
- God moved the Israelites to return to Jerusalem.
- God moved the enemies of the Jews.

*Tigris River*

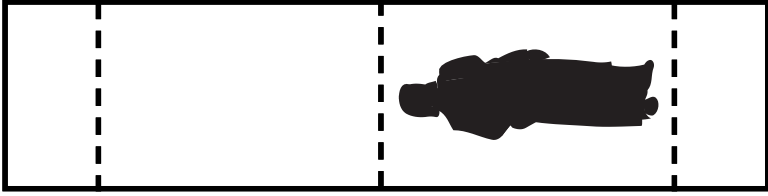




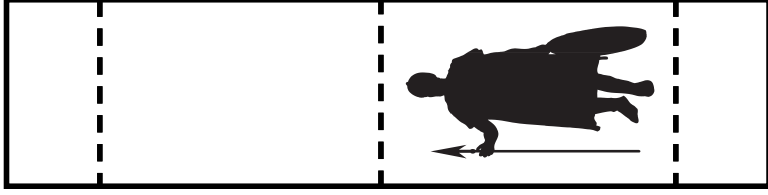
# God Moves People to Accomplish His Will



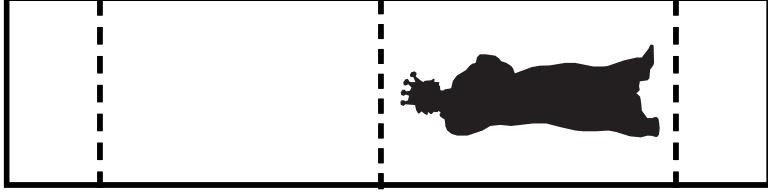
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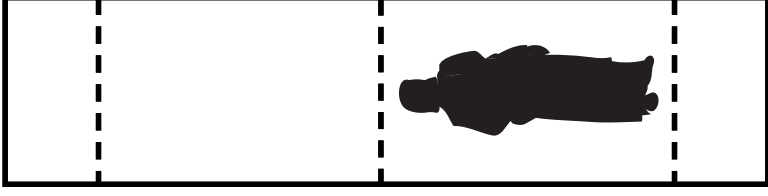
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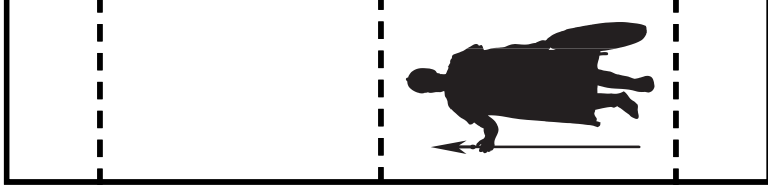
Enemy



King



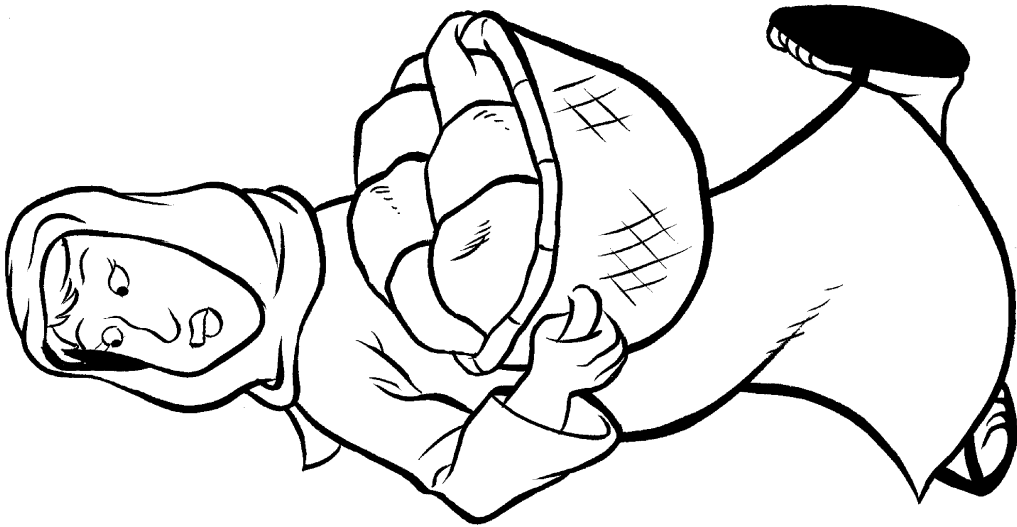
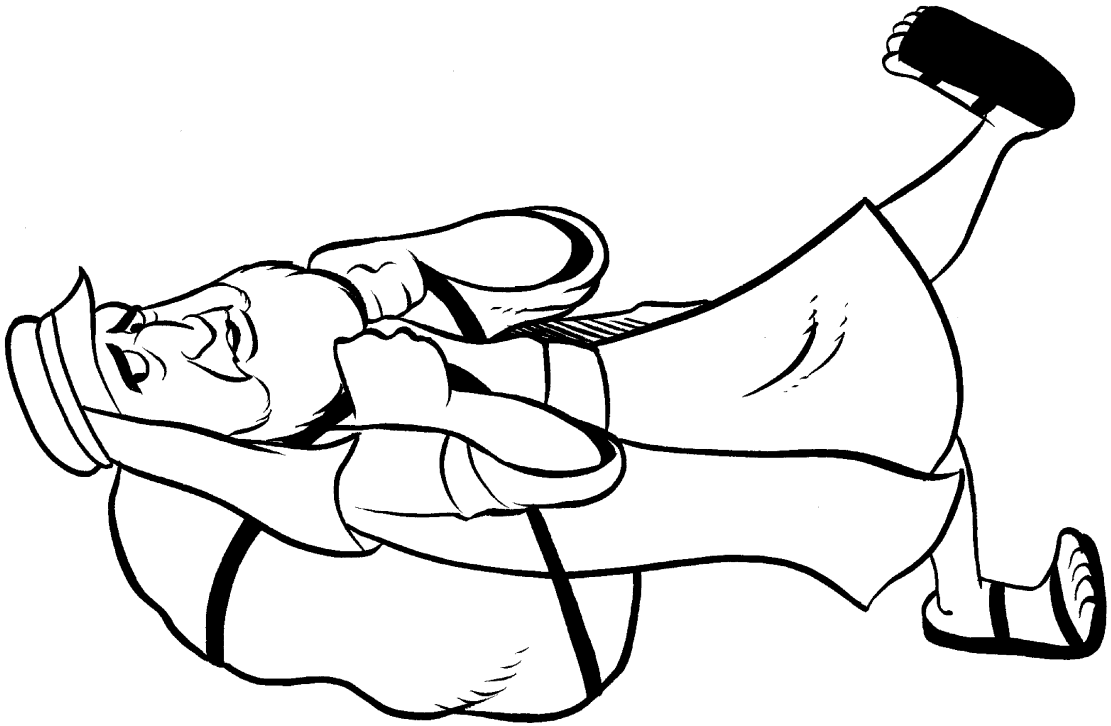
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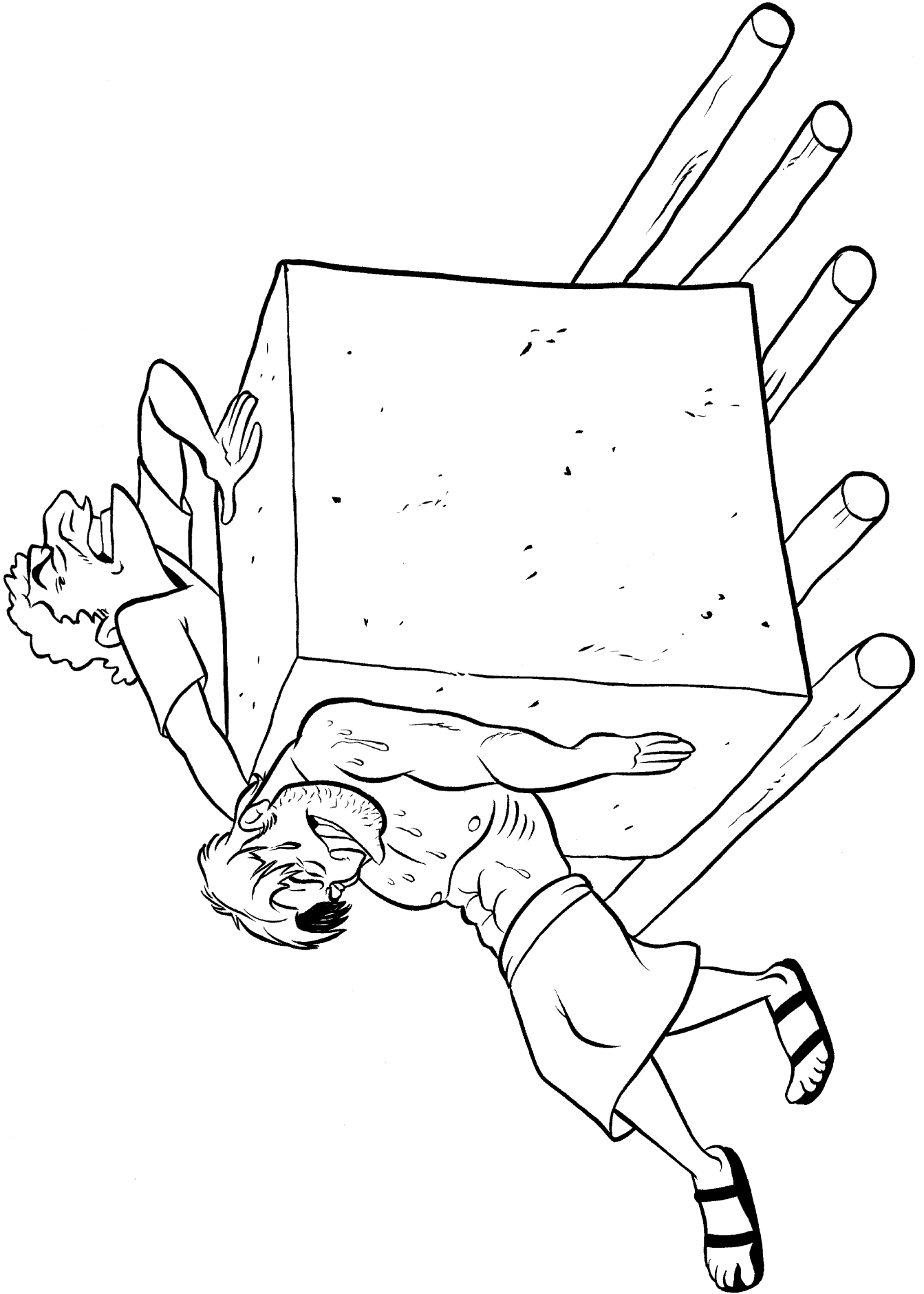
Enemy















After 70 years of captivity, God moved King Cyrus to make a decree allowing the Jews to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4).





**“...and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began work and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the LORD” (Ezra 3:8b).**

