



5

Restoring Worship

Key Theme

- God is sovereign over all things.

Key Passages

- Ezra 1:1–2:2, 3:1–11, 6:13–18, 6:22; Proverbs 21:1

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe God’s role in the rebuilding of the Temple.
- Describe the people’s reaction to the rebuilt Temple.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Students will practice the memory verse by working on a crossword puzzle and reciting the verse to a friend.

- Write on the board, “How did God direct the rebuilding of the Temple?”
- Print one Memory Verse Review Sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.



Studying God’s Word

The prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah finally came true! The Jews, who had been taken captive 70 years earlier, were released to go back to their homeland by King Cyrus. They went to work once they arrived. First they restored worship. Then they rebuilt the Temple. And when the Temple was completed, they rejoiced.

- Go Before the Throne.
- Read through the lesson key passages and Prepare to Share.



Activity: The King’s Heart

The students will examine passages of Scripture that describe God’s direction over governments.

- Student Guides
- Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the lesson key passages along with this background.

You have probably heard Proverbs 21:1: “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.” We have looked at several instances in the history of the nation of Israel where God providentially directed rulers to accomplish His will: Pharaoh released the Israelite slaves; Assyria overthrew the Northern Kingdom; Babylon conquered Jerusalem in the South. All of these rulers were under the divine guidance of God. Just as the Israelites were taken captive under God’s direction, so, too, were they released from that captivity.

The opening words of the book of Ezra point directly to God’s sovereign hand in fulfilling the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah. Both of these men had foretold the captivity of the Jerusalem Jews. Nearly 200 years before these events even happened, Isaiah had named Cyrus as the one who would allow the return to Jerusalem (Isaiah 44:28–45:1). It was Jeremiah who told of the duration of the captivity and the end of that time had come. The 70 years were completed. The Jews were about to return to Israel . . . and God was intimately involved.

Although the Babylonians had conquered Jerusalem in 607 BC when the 70 years of captivity began, the Medo-Persian Empire had risen to take control over Babylon under King Cyrus in 538. Contrary to the policies of the Babylonians, the Persians allowed the people they conquered to remain in their lands and for those who had been previously taken captive to return to their homelands. And that is exactly what God stirred Cyrus to do for the Jews in 537 (Ezra 1:1). Cyrus wrote a proclamation announcing that the Lord God (*Yahweh Elohim*) had given him the kingdoms of the earth and that he was to send the Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.

Not only did God stir the heart of the king, but He also stirred the hearts of many of the leaders of the Jews to return to Jerusalem. Many of the Jews and the

others around them also gave richly for the rebuilding. Not to be outdone, Cyrus gave back all of the treasures that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple 70 years earlier. These were given to Sheshbazzar, prince of Judah, who took them back to Jerusalem. Along with him, Zerubbabel led the return and became the main governor over the people in Jerusalem (Ezra 2:1–2). The rest of chapter 2 details in amazing specificity those who returned to Jerusalem to begin to repopulate the city and rebuild the Temple—42,360 Jews plus their servants and thousands of animals.

As the people arrived in Jerusalem, they settled into homes and then gathered together at Jerusalem in the seventh month after their return (Ezra 3:1). They rebuilt the altar and began offering sacrifices again for the first time in 70 years. They also kept the festivals that had been neglected for so long and remembered all that God had done for them and what He would still do. They were still looking forward to when the sacrifices would be set aside and the Messiah would reign.

The next step was rebuilding the Temple. The Temple had been burned and leveled in 588 BC at the hands of the Babylonians (2 Chronicles 36:17–21), and its foundations had to be restored so that God could be worshipped in the way He had prescribed. As the foundation for the Temple was completed, the people and the priests gathered around to the sounds of the singers and instruments (Ezra 3:8–11). “And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord: ‘For He is good, for His mercy endures forever toward Israel.’ Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.”

But soon after . . . the jubilation stopped. Those people who had settled in the land in the absence of the Jews opposed the rebuilding and did all they could to frustrate the plans. This lasted for 16 years, during which the people become complacent and lost their focus on rebuilding the Temple (Ezra 4:1–23).

At this time, God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to the people to encourage them to continue to build. As they restarted the construction, more oppo-

sition was raised and a letter was sent to the new king, Darius, to settle the matter (Ezra 5). Darius had the archives searched and found that Cyrus had ordered the rebuilding of the Temple. Darius also commanded that more provisions be given to the Jews to finish the construction (Ezra 6:1–12). God’s mighty hand had, again, assured that the Temple would be rebuilt.

As the construction continued, Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people. Construction was finally completed in 515 BC—21 years after Zerubbabel had begun the work (6:13–15). As the people gathered together with the priests at the dedication of the Temple, the scene was again jubilant; the sacrifices for the covering of sins could once again be performed (6:16–18). There was hope in God’s plan for covering sin until the Messiah would come.

God directed the heart of the king. God directed the hearts of the leaders. God directed the messages of the prophets. His fingerprints are everywhere. Undoubtedly, He was guiding the hearts of the kings, and the Jewish leaders and people, to restore His worship at the Temple (Ezra 6:22).

Let us not forget that all of this was done to point forward to Jesus. The Temple and the sacrifices that took place there were a shadow of Jesus. The Passover and the other festivals that were celebrated all pointed forward to Jesus. God was continuing to guide history to the birth of the Messiah and the redemption that would be accomplished when God took on flesh to dwell with men. Now that redemption is accomplished, we live daily in the Spirit of Christ and we are the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19).

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Just as the fall of the Southern Kingdom of Judah to the Babylonians happened in three stages, so did the return to restore Jerusalem. This lesson covers only the first stage of the return that happened in 538 BC. As Cyrus decreed, the Jews from around the Persian

(once Babylonian) Empire began the process of resettling Judah under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Sheshbazzar, and Jeshua the priest.

The second return happened under the leadership of Ezra in 467 BC; we will talk about that event in Lesson 8. If you read Ezra 2, you may have noticed the name Nehemiah in the list (Ezra 2:2). However, this is not the same Nehemiah you are probably familiar with. The third phase of the return to Jerusalem under Nehemiah happened in 454 BC—84 years after Cyrus ordered the first return. These events are recorded in the book of Nehemiah, and we will study them in Lesson 9.

Just as Proverbs 21:1 (and many other passages) reminds us, all of these events happened under the guidance of our wise, loving, omnipotent Creator God. As we study His faithfulness to those in the past, let it stir us to be confident that He will be faithful to us in the future.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Oh, Lord, you are good! Your mercies endure forever. How my heart rejoiced when I read about the people of Judah completing the building of the Temple. I understand what it’s like to long for something and wait on you for it to come to pass. I don’t always see the answer to my prayers like the Jews did through these events. But, I still wait and hope, trusting you. I was encouraged and reminded how mighty you are and faithful to fulfill your promises. May my students rejoice together as they see this long-awaited prophecy fulfilled as Cyrus, moved by you, sent the Jews back to their homeland and helped them rebuild their center of worship. I pray my students will come to understand your sovereignty and faithfulness in a personal way as we study this lesson.

➤ **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





COME ON IN

- Write on the board, “How did God direct the rebuilding of the Temple?”
- Students will practice the memory verse by working on a crossword puzzle and reciting the verse to a friend.



Review

Our last lesson was the final lesson during the 70 years of the Babylonian Captivity, though we will come back to a lesson dealing with Daniel’s visions. Remember that the captivity came in three waves beginning in 607 BC when Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem. Daniel and others were carried away at that time. Then there was a second deportation in 599 BC, and the final destruction in 588 BC. *Refer to the History of Israel poster showing the three downward steps in the timeline representing the three stages of the captivity.*

? **What was significant about the third stage of the captivity?** *The walls of Jerusalem were torn down and the Temple and the city were burned (2 Chronicles 36:17–21).*

Our lesson today marks the first stage in the return to Jerusalem. You will notice on the timeline that there are also three upward steps. The return to Jerusalem parallels the captivity in that it happened in three stages. We will be looking at the first stage today and the others over the next several weeks.



➤ Write on the board, “How did God direct the rebuilding of the Temple?”



Studying God’s Word

READ THE WORD

Let’s read Ezra 1:1–2:2 together to see how the return came about. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **Who was the king in this passage?** *Cyrus king of Persia. Knowing this was his first year, we can place the date at 537 BC.*
- ? **What is the reference to Jeremiah?** *Jeremiah had prophesied that the captivity would last 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11).*
- ? **Why did Cyrus make the proclamation?** *God had stirred up his heart to make the proclamation.*

- ? **Who was the proclamation delivered to?** *All of his kingdom.*
- ? **Flip back a page to the close of 2 Chronicles. What do you notice about that passage beginning in 36:22?** *It is the same as the beginning of Ezra, but it ends in the middle of the proclamation.*
- ? **What interesting things do you notice about the proclamation of Cyrus?** *He acknowledges that the Lord God of heaven had given him all of the kingdoms; he acknowledges that God has commanded him to build the Temple in Jerusalem; he calls the Jews in his kingdom to return to their land; he calls for the non-Jews (others) to support the efforts with material wealth.*
- ? **One of those points is most interesting and ties to a previous prophet. How is it that Cyrus knew God had ordered him to rebuild the Temple?** *It is likely that he had been shown the writings of Isaiah, possibly by Daniel (Daniel 6:28). Isaiah had called him by name in Isaiah 44:28 nearly 200 years earlier.*
- ? **What did Isaiah write about Cyrus in Isaiah 44:28?** *Cyrus is called God's shepherd to perform His pleasures, and is portrayed as saying to Jerusalem and the Temple that they shall be rebuilt.*

Isaiah 44:28

Some people claim that because Isaiah wrote about Cyrus by name, Isaiah 44 must have been written after the time of Cyrus. They reason that there is no way Isaiah could know the future in such detail. However, because God is omniscient (all-knowing), He was able to give Isaiah detailed information about what was in the future, including the name of the future king of Persia.

- ? **Back to Ezra. How did the leaders of Judah and Benjamin respond?** *They prepared to return to Jerusalem.*
- ? **Why did they respond this way?** *God moved their spirits to respond.*
- ? **How were the Jews encouraged by the other people around them?** *The others encouraged them with silver, gold, goods, and livestock to return to Jerusalem.*
- ? **What other event in Israel's history does this detail parallel?** *This is very similar to the Exodus where the Egyptians gave them articles of wealth as they departed (Exodus 12:35–36).*
- ? **What else did Cyrus do to help the Jews?** *He gave them the Temple treasure that had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar. Here we see an amazing connection to the history of the empires of the region. Persia had overthrown Babylon under Cyrus's rule and was now in possession of the Temple treasure taken by the Babylonians 70 years earlier. This had also been prophesied by Jeremiah in Jeremiah 27:22.*
- ? **Who is Sheshbazzar?** *He is a prince of Judah.*
- ? **Who led the Jews back to Jerusalem?** *Zerubbabel led them back according to 2:2. Apparently, Cyrus saw Sheshbazzar as the leader, but Zerubbabel was the one who actually took charge and who led once they reached Jerusalem as revealed in the following chapters. Zerubbabel was a descendant of David, the great-grandson of Jehoiakim.*

As we look ahead to the rest of chapter 2, we see detailed lists of those families who returned with Zerubbabel. One of those mentioned is

Jeshua. He is also called Joshua in other books and is in the priestly line (2:40). The Nehemiah and Mordecai mentioned in 2:2 are not those of the book of Nehemiah or the Mordecai of Esther.

Discover the Truth

God had proclaimed through the mouths and pens of Isaiah and Jeremiah that the Jews would return to Jerusalem after 70 years and that the Temple and the city would be rebuilt. But this wasn't a random prophecy, but a very specific proclamation of the very king who would bring these things to pass.

SOVEREIGN

OMNISCIENT

Proverbs 21:1

- ? **What attributes of God are displayed in bringing about these events?** *We see His sovereignty in His direction of the events and omniscience in His proclamation of future events.*
- ? **How does Proverbs 21:1 help us to understand Ezra 1 more fully?** *This passage teaches that God directs the heart of the king where He wishes, and we can see a clear example of that in Ezra 1. The things that Cyrus does don't really make sense from the perspective of a pagan king ruling over his kingdom. There is surely a supernatural cause behind his actions—God stirred his heart to do these things according to His will.*

God had brought about His plans, and the restoration He had promised was beginning to come to pass. He had provided the resources and the opportunity to bring His children out of their captivity and demonstrated His authority as the King of the universe.





The King's Heart

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

There are many examples of God's authority and control over human government in Scripture. In your Student Guides, you will find The King's Heart activity. Take a few minutes to look at each of the verses listed and write down a short statement about what they teach about the relationship between God and earthly government. We will talk about what you find in a few minutes. *Have the students work on a summary statement in groups.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Discuss each of the passages briefly, working to the summary statement. Have each group report their summary statement and arrive at a group consensus statement to write on the board.

- **Genesis 20:4–7** God restrained King Abimelech from sinning.
- **Exodus 4:21–23** God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he would not let the people go.
- **1 Samuel 16:9–13** God chose who would be the next king of Israel.

- **Daniel 2:21** God removes kings and raises up kings.
- **Daniel 4:17, 4:25, 4:32, 5:21** God gives the kingdoms of men to whomever He chooses.
- **Isaiah 40:22–25** God is more powerful than the princes of the earth.
- **John 19:11** God gave Pilate the authority to punish Jesus.
- **Romans 13:1–4** Governing authority comes from God and each is appointed by God—they are God's ministers.
- **1 Peter 2:13–14** We are to submit to government for the Lord's sake.

Write a statement that summarizes God's relationship to human government: *God ordains and directs those who are in power over human civilizations.*

Cyrus did what he did because he was under the guiding hand of the God who ordains and directs those who are in power over human civilizations. In this statement we must be careful to not minimize the responsibility that the leaders have for their actions—positive or negative. But we cannot question the overwhelming number of passages (and we have only looked at a handful) that point to God's control over the nations. The king's heart is in God's hand, and He directs it where He wills.



READ THE WORD

Once the Jews were organized and supplied, they were headed back to Jerusalem with the king's blessing. We are going to look at two passages that are separated by a bit of time. The passage from chapter 3 happens in 536 BC shortly after they had departed. We will be skipping over a period of 20 years as we move to chapter 6. During those years, there was much opposition from the governors of the area. Haggai and Zechariah were sent by God to stir up the people to complete the work on the Temple. There were also letters back and forth to the kings. I will leave you to read the information in the gap, but I want us to look at the response of the people to the completion of the altar and the Temple. Will someone please read Ezra 3:1–11? *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Ezra 3:1–11

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? After settling into their homes, what work did the Jews complete first? *They built the altar so that the sacrifices could commence.*
- ? What pattern did they follow to build the altar and offer the sacrifices? *They followed what was written by Moses. This refers to the instructions given to Moses by God and recorded in Exodus.*
- ? What were the people afraid of as they built? *They were afraid of the people around them—those who had settled in the land in the absence of the Jews.*
- ? How else did they worship God? *They kept the Feast of Tabernacles and continued to offer the daily sacrifices and the other appointed feasts.*
- ? What preparations were being made in verses 6 and 7? *They continued the sacrifices while they were planning for and paying for the materials and workmen for the Temple.*
- ? How much time passed as we move to verse 8? *About seven or eight months had passed.*
- ? What was happening while the foundation stones were being laid? *The priests and musicians were there offering praise to the Lord.*
- ? How did the people of Israel respond? *They shouted with a great shout and praised the Lord as the foundation was laid. Those who had seen the first Temple wept while others rejoiced.*

Sadly, the adversaries of Israel rose up and stopped the construction. As the political battle raged, the Israelites lost heart and the building stopped for about 16 years. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah stirred up the people and delivered God's command to resume the building and King Darius sent a letter affirming the order from Cyrus.

Let's pick up the account in Ezra 6:13–22. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Ezra 6:13–22

- ? **When was the Temple completed?** *The completion comes in the sixth year of the reign of Darius. This places the date in 515 BC—21 years after Zerubbabel had led them back to Jerusalem.*
- ? **How did the Israelites respond at the dedication of the Temple?** *They offered many sacrifices and celebrated with joy.*
- ? **How did the people respond to the keeping of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread?** *They kept it earnestly and with joy.*
- ? **Why did they have joy?** *The Lord had made them joyful.*
- ? **What else had God done for them?** *God had turned the heart of Darius to be favorable toward them.*

Discover the Truth

Again, we see God turning the heart of the king, Darius in this case, to favor the Jews and encouraging the people to finish the work of the Temple. God has brought about, with much delay and contention, the decree made through Isaiah and Jeremiah and directed through Cyrus. In response, His people offered worship and praise to their God—a proper response to His goodness to them.



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

God directed the heart of the king. God directed the hearts of the leaders. God directed the messages of the prophets. His fingerprints are everywhere. There is no doubt that He was guiding the hearts of the kings—and the Jewish leaders and people—to restore His worship at the Temple (6:22). All of this happened so that the praises and sacrifices could commence from the Temple and so that the people could practice the festivals and sacrifices that all pointed forward to Jesus.

Let us not forget that all of this was done to point forward to Jesus. The Temple and the sacrifices that took place there were a shadow of Jesus. The Passover and the other festivals that were celebrated all pointed forward to Jesus. God was continuing to guide history to the birth of the Messiah and the redemption that would be accomplished when God came in the flesh to dwell with men. Now that redemption is accomplished, and we live daily in the Spirit of Christ and we are the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19).

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? **How would you describe God's role in the rebuilding of the Temple?** *Discuss God's guiding role through several centuries including the preservation of the Temple treasures, the words of Isaiah, and the stirring up of the heart of Cyrus.*
- ? **What has struck you most about God's involvement in the affairs of men after studying these passages today?** *Discuss various answers, focusing on God's sovereignty and wisdom in directing the course of history to bring about His plan of redemption. Refer to the Scarlet Thread Poster, showing God's redemptive plans in bringing the Messiah through the tribe of Judah. It is this tribe that lived in Jerusalem. The reestablishment of the people in Judah allowed Jesus to be born in Bethlehem and fulfill the prophecies of the Messiah.*
- ? **How do the many passages that we looked at regarding the influence of God in the kingdoms of men influence the way that you interpret and think about the government that is ruling over our country?** *We should find great comfort in knowing that God is in control of the government. Even if there are people in power who we do not agree with, we can pray for them and trust that God can change their hearts or direct them in the way He would have them go.*
- ? **What lessons can we learn about trusting God from the events of the rebuilding of the Temple?** *Discuss various ideas including truly trusting in God's wisdom, timing, and control.*
- ? **How does this lesson help us to look to Christ as the source of our hope?** *Discuss various answers. Consider referencing Romans 8:28–30.*
- ? **How could you use the information from this lesson to encourage a fellow saint who is discouraged about events and circumstances in society?** *God's sovereignty and care for His people is on display in all of the events, over a 200-year period—and that should give us great hope in the future God intends.*



MEMORY VERSE

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for revealing how He has worked throughout history to bring about His plans.
- Praise God for His wisdom and guidance of the affairs of men.
- Ask God for the faith to trust Him more, looking to Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith.