Bible Stories for Adults
Judah Returns From Captivity
Ezra & Nehemiah

Opening

Gathering: What great things has God done to His glory through the members of my church?

Today’s Focus: God returned the Jews to Israel as He had promised. They responded with a renewed faithfulness.

Key Verses: What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, our God, You have punished us less than our sins have deserved and have given us a remnant like this. Ezra 9:13

In Your great mercy You did not put an end to them or abandon them, for You are a gracious and merciful God. Nehemiah 9:31

Opening Prayer

Lesson

Judah Exiled in Babylon (Jeremiah 29:1-23)

Why had the Jews been exiled to Babylon? = Exiled, but not abandoned
Nehemiah 9:16, 29-31 (1-37) = They rejected God’s commands & His prophets

What had God promised before the exile that comforted the Jews in Babylon?
Isaiah 13:1, 17, 19; 14:1 = God would stir Medes (Persians) against Babylon & return Israel

Did the Jews have any idea how long they would have to wait for this to happen?
Jeremiah 29:10-14 = They would return after repenting and 70 yrs of exile

What action did Daniel take when the 70 years were nearly complete?
Daniel 9:1-3 (1-19) = He prayed and fasted for God to return the Jews

The Edict of Restoration (Ezra 1)

Who was responsible for sending the Jews back to Judah and why?
Ezra 1:1-2 = God appointed Cyrus to build a temple in Jerusalem

After being settled for 70 years, who gave up their homes and returned?
Ezra 1:3, 5 (3-5) = everyone whose heart God had moved (a sifting to get the most faithful)

How could these people afford the move and living during the temple construction?
Ezra 1:6 = Neighbors gave money, livestock, etc. per Cyrus’ edict (v 4)

What important items did Cyrus send back with this first group of Jews?
Ezra 1:7 = Gold & silver articles taken from the temple by Nebuchadnezzar

How much wealth did the remnant bring?
Ezra 1:8, 11 (8-11) = 5400 gold & silver items

Who was this Sheshbazzar that Cyrus appointed as governor over Judah? = Don’t read in class

1 Chronicles 3:17; Ezra 5:2, 14-16; Haggai = Jehoiachin’s grandson, also called Zerubbabel

Note: Scholars disagree as to whether Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel were the same person

Where do we see Zerubbabel later? = Don’t read in class

How many Jews returned?
Ezra 2:1, 64-67 (1-70) = Over 42,000 plus 7500 servants (537 BC)
Reconstruction of the Temple  *Ezra 3*

What did the Jews begin to do after first settling in the towns?
Ezra 3:1-2  (1-6) = Rebuilt the altar and began sacrifices (had been there 3 months)

What was special about this happening in the seventh month (Tishri)?
Leviticus 23:24, 27, 34 = Sacred month with Trumpets, Day of Atonement & Feast of Tabernacles

What was their next step after building the altar and starting sacrifices?
Ezra 3:8  (8-9) = They began rebuilding the temple

How did the Jews feel react they saw the temple foundations?
Ezra 3:10-13 = They wept aloud and shouted for joy in celebration

Efforts Frustrated by Samaritans  *Ezra 4*

Who wanted to help rebuild the temple?
Ezra 4:1-2 = Samaritans: We've sacrificed to God since the Assyrians brought us here

Were these really Israelites & did they follow Jehovah as the one true God?
2 Kings 17:22-24, 28, 33 = Others settled in Samaria, taught to worship God in Jeroboam's way

Did the Jews accept this help & why or why not?
Ezra 4:3 = No, the Samaritans weren't pure Israelites - Besides, the king only said us

How did the Samaritans accept this rejection?
Ezra 4:4-5 = They worked to frustrate the reconstruction efforts through lawyers…

What happened as a result of this opposition? = See timeline on page 4
Ezra 4:24 = Reconstruction of the temple was stopped until the second year of Darius

Temple Construction Resumed  *Ezra 5-6*

Why did God raise the prophets Haggai and Zechariah? = Both were called in the second year of Darius
Haggai 1:1-4, 7-8  (1-15) = To remind the people to build His temple

Did the people listen to these prophets?
Ezra 5:1-2 = Yes, the Jews began working on the temple again

Did they meet any opposition this second time around? = Wrote a letter to King Darius
Ezra 5:3, 5, 7, 17  (3-17) = Yes, the Samaritans tried to stop them again

How did King Darius respond?
Ezra 6:1-2  (1-5) = He searched records & found Cyrus' Restoration edict

What extra touch did Darius add?
Ezra 6:7-8  (6-12) = He ordered the Samaritans to stay away and to help financially

What did the Jews do after the temple was completed?
Ezra 6:15-16, 19  (13-22) = They dedicated the temple and celebrated Passover in 515 BC

Reconstruction of the City Walls  *Ezra 4*

Was there any opposition when the Jews began to rebuild Jerusalem’s city walls?
Ezra 4:6 = Under Xerxes, the Samaritans tried again to thwart the Jews' efforts

Note: King Xerxes married a Jew (Esther) who saved Jews from annihilation – last week’s story

What did the Samaritans do after not being able to get Xerxes to stop the construction?
Ezra 4:11-13  (7-16) = Wrote to King Artaxerxes (Xerxes' son) warning of danger of revolt

Did King Artaxerxes agree with their concern?
Ezra 4:19, 21  (17-23) = Yes, and he ordered the reconstruction to stop

You can find Bible Stories for Adults on the web at www.biblestoriesforadults.com
Nehemiah Gets Involved *(Nehemiah 1-3)*

Note: The Book of Nehemiah was originally part of the Book of Ezra

Who was Nehemiah? = Cupbearer had to be a very trusted individual - threat of poisoning
  Nehemiah 2:1 = He was a Jew serving as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes

For what did Nehemiah ask of King Artaxerxes? = He prayed before making request (v4)
  Nehemiah 2:4-5 (1:1-2:5) = He asked for permission & authority to rebuild Jerusalem's city walls

Besides letting him go and funding the effort, how else did Artaxerxes help Nehemiah?
  Nehemiah 2:9 (6-10) = He sent Nehemiah with letters and military protection

What did Nehemiah do soon after he arrived in Jerusalem?
  Nehemiah 2:15-16 (11-16) = He secretly inspected the city walls

How did the Jews respond to Nehemiah's call to begin rebuilding the walls?
  Nehemiah 2:17-18 = They agreed and immediately began the work

Nehemiah 3 = Various sections were assigned to different groups (Don't read in class)

Let's Try Again *(Nehemiah 4)*

Did they meet any opposition the second time around? = Nehemiah took a bold stand
  Nehemiah 2:10, 19-20 = Others asked: *Are you rebelling against the king?*

How did the Samaritans respond when the walls started going up?
  Nehemiah 4:1-3 = The Samaritans ridiculed the Jews and their efforts

How did the Samaritans respond when the wall reached half its height?
  Nehemiah 4:6-8, 11-12 (4-12) = They planned to attack Jerusalem and end the work

Did this threat stop the efforts?
  Nehemiah 4:16-18 (13-23) = The Jews kept working but were always ready to defend

Jerusalem's City Walls are Completed *(Nehemiah 6)*

What other opposition did Nehemiah resist? = Tried to draw Nehemiah out of town to harm him,
  Nehemiah 6:2, 5-10, 13 (1-14) = Charged treason, and tried to discredit him

How long did this reconstruction effort take?
  Nehemiah 6:15-16 = 52 days, To God's glory

What did the Jews do after the city walls were completed?
  Nehemiah 12:27, 31, 38, 40, 43 = Dedicated wall in huge celebration and parade on the wall

How was Jerusalem populated?
  Nehemiah 11:1-2 = Ten percent of the Jews were chosen by lot to live in Jerusalem

Ezra Returns to Jerusalem *(Ezra 7-8)*

Who was Ezra? = Sent to Jerusalem under Artaxerxes, around 80 years after return under Cyrus
  Ezra 7:1, 6 (1-10) = Jewish scribe in Babylon, well versed in God's Law, descended from Aaron

Why was Ezra sent to Jerusalem?
  Ezra 7:19-20, 25-26 (11-28) = To outfit temple; teach and execute God's Law

Why did King Artaxerxes go out of his way for the Jews like this?
  Ezra 7:23 = To win the favor of the Jews' God

What did Ezra do before setting out for Jerusalem with around 2000 men and riches?
  Ezra 8:21 (1-36) = Everyone fasted 3 days and asked God for a safe journey
Ezra’s First Crisis  *(Ezra 9-10)*

What was the first problem Ezra was presented in Jerusalem?
Ezra 9:1-2  (1-3)  =  Jews had not stayed separate and had intermarried

What did Ezra and the people agree to do?
Ezra 10:10-12  (1-44)  =  Remove foreign wives and their children (v3) from the community

Law Reform  *(Nehemiah 8-9)*

How did the people learn about God's Law?
Nehemiah 8:2-3  (1-4)  =  Ezra read the Book of the Law to the large assembly

Did the people really want to learn God's Law or were they just watching a show?
Nehemiah 8:5-6  =  The people shouted Amen!, bowed down and worshipped

How did the people understand since they now spoke Aramaic?
Nehemiah 8:8  (7-8)  =  Levites translated the Hebrew to Aramaic

How did the people respond when they realized how they had been sinning?
Nehemiah 8:9  =  They cried & mourned

How did they respond later in the month after their situation sank in?
Nehemiah 9:1-3  (1-37)  =  They were greatly moved & confessed their sins

Did they decide to do anything in response to their now-recognized guilt?
Nehemiah 9:38; 10:29  (9:38-10:39)  =  Rededicated selves & made an oath to keep God's Laws

Closing Prayer

**Persian Rulers**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>522</td>
<td>Cambyses II</td>
<td>Died</td>
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<tr>
<td>529</td>
<td>Cambyses II</td>
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<td>553</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Darius Cyaxares II</td>
<td>Issued Decree of Restoration</td>
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<tr>
<td>465</td>
<td>Artaxerxes I</td>
<td>Murdered</td>
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<tr>
<td>485</td>
<td>Artaxerxes II</td>
<td>Died</td>
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<td>465-424</td>
<td>Artaxerxes II</td>
<td>Commanded Temple Reconstruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>424</td>
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<td>424-405</td>
<td>Darius II</td>
<td>Died</td>
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<tr>
<td>405</td>
<td>Artaxerxes II</td>
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<td>359-338</td>
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<td>338</td>
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<td>336</td>
<td>Darius III</td>
<td>Conquered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>333-</td>
<td>Alexander the Great (Greek)</td>
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Response - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. What consequences have I experienced from going against God’s will?
   *(Ezra 9:13; Nehemiah 9:29-30, 37; Leviticus 26:14-39; 2 Kings 18:11-12)*

2. How have I responded when God has worked through me to do great things?
   *(Ezra 3:10-13; 6:16; Nehemiah 12:43; Exodus 15; Ephesians 3:2-13)*

3. How have others frustrated my efforts to do the Lord’s work?
   *(Nehemiah 4; Galatians 1:6-10; 5:7-12; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16)*

4. How have I unwittingly frustrated the efforts of others doing the Lord’s work?
   *(Ezra 5; Acts 11; 15; Romans 14:13; 1 Corinthians 8)*

5. When have I felt remorse after recognizing that I sinned against God?
   *(Ezra 9:6-7; Nehemiah 8; 2 Samuel 12:1-23; Ezekiel 33:10-11; Matthew 26:69-75)*

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