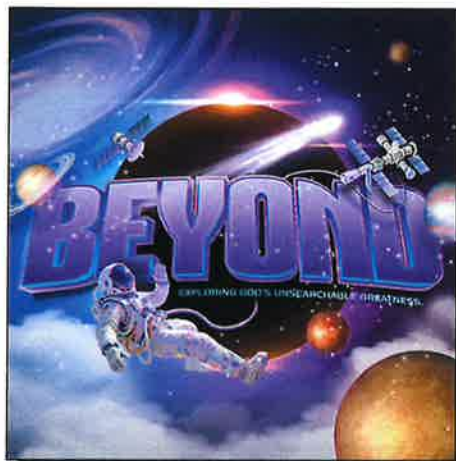




THE EXILES RETURN

BIBLE PASSAGE: Ezra 1–3; 7; Nehemiah 1–2

FOCUS VERSES: Colossians 3:23–24; Ephesians 2:10; 4:11–12

Summary: The Israelite people had been in exile for 70 years. King Cyrus was stirred by the Lord to let some of the people return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Ezra later took a second group and encouraged all of the people to turn away from sin and turn to God. Nehemiah heard about how the walls of his home, Jerusalem, were destroyed. He received permission to go back and help rebuild the walls. God used His people to do His work to restore the city.



MONTHLY *Memory Verse*

*Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised,
and His greatness is unsearchable.*

(PSALM 145:3)



**God works through
His people.**

We will go deeper in God's truth by answering these questions:



DOES GOD NEED PEOPLE?

God doesn't need anyone or anything, but He loves us and chooses to involve us in His work.



HOW CAN GOD WORK THROUGH US?

God calls us to share His love and serve others—in our church, in our community and around the world.



HOW IS GOD INVITING ME TO RESPOND?

Kids will reflect and respond to the truth they learned about God.

Leader TRAINING

LEADER TRAINING TOPIC: PATTERN OF PRAYER

Kids become more comfortable with prayer as they begin to understand the pattern of prayer. Practice stillness. Begin with praise. Confess your sins. Thank God. Pray for yourself and others. Practicing this pattern each week will help kids know what to expect and be prepared to pray.

- **Sitting Still.** Turn off the lights and invite kids to sit still and focus on God.
- **Popcorn Praise.** Call out a letter and invite kids to stand up and praise God for who He is, using a word that starts with that letter (e.g., "God, you are Amazing").
- **Confession.** Encourage kids to sit quietly and reflect on things they need to confess to God. Ask them to ask His forgiveness for those things silently.
- **Thanksgiving Together.** Set a timer and see how long your group can thank God for specific things.
- **Pray for You/Me.** Encourage kids to pray for themselves, asking God to help them live out the lessons they learn. Next, challenge them to pray for someone else.

NAVIGATING A BROKEN WORLD: EARNING SALVATION

Almost half of U.S. adults believe that salvation is earned by doing good deeds in their lives.* Salvation by grace alone goes against our human instinct of working to get what we want. Kids' natural, default belief will be that they have to do good things to go to heaven or to earn God's favor. You may have kids in your group who feel they must do good things to earn God's love. In today's lesson kids will learn that God works through us and that we can serve Him by serving others and sharing His love. Listen carefully to kids' responses, pointing them toward the grace of God. Help them see that our works are a response to God's love and goodness, not an effort to try to earn His favor.

*For more resources on this topic, check out:

[britecurriculum.com/resources](https://www.britecurriculum.com/resources)

ELEMENTARY GLOSSARY

Omnipotent: having unlimited power; stronger than anything

Temple: the holy place where God's people went to worship Him

Bible TEACHING

THE EXILES RETURN EZRA 1-3; 7; NEHEMIAH 1-2



PRAY: God, please help us see today that You never abandon Your people. Israel's sin separated them from You, yet You worked through others to bring them back. Thank You for Your love that never quits! Amen.

Ask 12 volunteers to stand in a line at the front of your space facing the group.

Say: These 12 people represent the 12 tribes of Israel. God's people had been in exile for about 70 years. Because of their disobedience, the Lord had let their enemies capture them and take them away from their home.

Ask every other person in the line to take a seat. Six volunteers should now be at the front.

Say: Then God led Cyrus, king of Persia, to send some of the people of Judah back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The temple was the Israelites' place of worship, built by King Solomon. It had been destroyed when they were captured.

Ask two kids who just sat down to return to their places in line. Hang the sign titled "Temple Builders" around their necks.

Say: Cyrus also decreed that the Persian people would give silver and gold to the Israelites to help rebuild the temple. Cyrus even found items that had been stolen from the temple and returned them. The people returned to Jerusalem and worked together to rebuild the temple.

Ask two more kids who previously sat to return to their places in line. Hang the sign titled "More Temple Builders" around their necks.

Say: When the foundation was laid, the priests led a great celebration of praise. The people sang with great joy.

SUPPLIES:

Bible, teaching slides, printable pages, yarn, scissors, hole punch

PREP:

Print the printable pages. Punch holes in the top corners of each page and tie yarn through the holes so the pages can be worn around volunteers' necks.

LEADER TIP:

For smaller groups, use six volunteers instead of 12.

Bible TEACHING CONTINUED

Show teaching illustration: The People Celebrate on the Temple Foundation.

Read Ezra 3:11 directly from the Bible: *And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, "For He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever toward Israel." And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.*

Say: When Artaxerxes became king, he allowed another group of exiles to return to Judah. One of these men was Ezra, a priest who loved studying and teaching God's Word.

Ask one more kid from the line who sat down to return to their place in line. Hang the sign titled "Ezra" around their neck.

Say: Ezra led the people to repent of their sin and live like God wanted them to. But there was another problem in Jerusalem. The surrounding walls that protected the city were destroyed. A man named Nehemiah heard this and was heartbroken for his home city. He asked God for help.

Say: Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. The king noticed how sad Nehemiah was and asked what was wrong. Nehemiah shared about the walls. The king asked what Nehemiah wanted.

Read Nehemiah 2:5 directly from the Bible: *And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it."*

Say: The king said yes and allowed Nehemiah to return.

Ask one more kid from the line who previously sat to return to their place in line. Hang the sign titled "Nehemiah" around their neck.

Show teaching illustration: Nehemiah Leads the Rebuilding of the Wall.

Say: Nehemiah rallied the people and began the hard work of rebuilding the walls together.

Ask everyone standing in the line to link arms.

Say: God worked through many people to bring the exiles home and to begin to rebuild Jerusalem.

Show teaching slide: Point to Jesus.



Bible TEACHING CONTINUED



POINT TO JESUS

Say: The Israelites were returning to a broken city. The temple and walls had been destroyed by their enemy as a result of their sin. Our whole world was broken when Adam and Eve sinned. Our world has pain, suffering, broken relationships and many other awful things. Worst of all, our relationship with God is broken. No one can work hard enough or do enough good things to fix our broken world. That is why Jesus came. Jesus paid the price for our sin, fixing the sin problem and making it possible for us to live with God forever. And one day, Jesus will restore this whole broken world and make it new.



TEMPLE BUILDERS



TEMPLE BUILDERS



MORE TEMPLE BUILDERS



MORE TEMPLE BUILDERS



EZRA



NEHEMIAH

Small Group ROADMAP

1

BELONG (10 MINUTES)

Goal: For kids to experience God's love through a welcoming community

DON'T BE AFRAID

SUPPLIES: Blindfolds (1 per 2 kids), several chairs

OR

HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

SUPPLIES: 5 1-gallon buckets (1 per 3 kids)

2

BELIEVE (10 MINUTES)

Goal: For kids to discover who God is by engaging with the Bible

WRITE TOGETHER

SUPPLIES: Bibles, teaching slide, whiteboard, dry-erase markers, painter's tape

OR

HELP WANTED

SUPPLIES: Bibles, printable page, scissors

3



DISCIPLESHIP DISCUSSION (10 MINUTES)

Goal: To engage kids in faith conversations that help them navigate a broken world with biblical wisdom

4

BECOME (10 MINUTES)

Goal: For kids to learn to follow Jesus by applying faith to their lives

HERE TO SERVE

SUPPLIES: Bibles, Take-Home page, writing supplies, printable page, painter's tape, scissors

OR

PRAYER CATEGORIES

SUPPLIES: Bibles, Take-Home page, writing supplies, printable pages, scissors



DON'T BE AFRAID

SUPPLIES:

Blindfolds (1 per 2 kids), several chairs

PREP:

Spread out the chairs around your space to create an obstacle course.

ADAPTATION FOR DIFFERENT LEARNERS: Use sunglasses with the lenses blacked out in place of a blindfold for sensory needs. Have a course without chairs for kids with physical limitations.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. *Welcome each kid by name and welcome any new kids to the group.*
2. **Discuss:** What was the best and worst part of your week?
3. **Discuss:** This month we are learning that God is greater than anything! How have you seen God's greatness this week?
4. **Discuss:** Have you ever done something that you were afraid to do? How did you overcome your fear? Did someone help you?
5. **Say:** God sometimes leads us to do things that are uncomfortable or scary, but He often puts people in our lives who help guide us.
6. *Divide kids into pairs. Assign one kid in each pair to wear a blindfold and the other to act as the guide. Position each pair at the start of the obstacle course.*
7. *Explain that the guide may give verbal directions only (e.g., telling their partner to step forward, turn, etc.) and may not touch their partner. Remind blindfolded kids to listen carefully to avoid bumping into chairs.*
8. *Have each pair move through the course.*
9. *Swap partners and have pairs complete the course again.*
10. **Discuss:** Seeing partner, what was it like guiding the blindfolded partner?
11. **Discuss:** Blindfolded partner, was it always easy to hear and follow your partner's directions? Why or why not?
12. **Discuss:** Blindfolded partner, were you ever nervous, even slightly, that you were going to run into a chair? Why or why not?

ACTIVITY WRAP-UP:

God works through His people, and He is with them even when it's hard or scary. Today we are learning about Ezra and Nehemiah, whom God used to lead tasks that weren't easy. But they knew that God was working through them.



HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

SUPPLIES:

5 1-gallon buckets (1 per 3 kids)

PREP:

Put the buckets on one side of your space.

LEADER TIP: If you are short on space, have kids lift the buckets onto chairs instead of carrying them across a large space.

ADAPTATION FOR DIFFERENT LEARNERS: The activity can be modified to move a plastic cup across the distance of the table to support kids with physical limitations.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. *Welcome each kid by name and welcome any new kids to the group.*
2. **Discuss:** What was the best and worst part of your week?
3. **Discuss:** This month we are learning that God is greater than anything! How have you seen God's greatness this week?
4. **Discuss:** Have you ever been a part of a group project where you had to work with others to complete a task or assignment? How did it go?
5. **Discuss:** Would it have been easier to do it yourself? Why or why not?
6. **Say:** I have some buckets that I need to move to the other side of our space. You will work together to move them. The only rule is that the bucket must be moved by three people who only touch the bottom of the bucket with four fingers each. You can't use your thumbs or touch any other part of the bucket once you start moving.
7. *Divide kids into groups of three and have them complete the task.*
8. **Discuss:** If you could have used your whole hand, would it have been easier to carry the bucket yourself? Why?
9. **Discuss:** Why is it often better to do things with other people rather than doing everything ourselves?



ACTIVITY WRAP-UP:

When we include others, it can give someone purpose and helps us connect. Today we are learning that God works through His people. God doesn't need people to help Him; He wants to involve them in what He is doing.



WRITE TOGETHER

SUPPLIES:

Bibles, teaching slide, whiteboard, dry-erase markers, painter's tape

PREP:

Print or show the Memory Verse teaching slide. Draw a line down the middle of the whiteboard. Mark a starting line on the ground with painter's tape several feet away from the whiteboard.

ADAPTATION FOR DIFFERENT LEARNERS: Have small verse cards printed for kids who need support with writing. They can carry it with them to copy their word.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Lead kids to find Psalm 145:3 in their Bibles. Read it aloud together.
2. **Discuss:** What does this verse tell us about God?
3. **Say:** No one is like God! He is greater than anyone or anything.
4. **Discuss:** How was the wall built in today's story? Do you think God could have made the wall on His own? Why?
5. **Discuss:** Does God need people?
6. **Say:** God doesn't need anyone or anything, but He loves us and chooses to involve us in His work.
7. **Say:** Let's play a game where we have to work together.
8. Divide kids into two teams. Each team will line up behind the tape line, facing the board. The first person in line will run up and write the first word of the verse on the board, then run back and tag the next person in line. The first team to write the whole verse, including the reference, wins.
9. Start the game and cheer on the kids.
10. Play the game a few times. To make it more challenging, see if the kids can write the verse backwards starting with the reference.
11. **Discuss:** Do you think it would be easier for God to do things on His own? Why?
12. **Discuss:** Why does God choose to work through His people?

ACTIVITY WRAP-UP:

God is so great that He doesn't need people. Yet He chooses to work through us for His glory.



HELP WANTED

SUPPLIES:

Bibles, printable page, scissors

PREP:

Print the printable page and cut out (1 per 2 kids).

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. **Discuss:** How did God work through Ezra and Nehemiah?
2. **Discuss:** Does God need people?
3. **Say:** God doesn't need anyone or anything, but He loves us and chooses to involve us in His work.
4. **Say:** Businesses hire people for a specific job with a specific purpose. The job will have a job description that explains what the job is, its purpose and how to do it. Followers of God are also following a job description.
5. **Say:** To figure out our "job description" as followers of Jesus, I have verses that show God's desire for us to work for Him, what our "job" is, the purpose of it and how we are to do it.
6. **Say:** In pairs, you will look up the verses and match them to the correct card.
7. *Divide kids into pairs and give them time to match their cards.*
8. *When pairs are finished with this, go over each one.*
 - Wanted? - Acts 17:24-25
 - Purpose? - Ephesians 2:10 and Matthew 5:16
 - What? - Ephesians 4:11-12 and Matthew 28:19-20
 - How? - Colossians 3:23-24
9. **Discuss:** If God does not need us, why does He choose to work through us?
10. **Discuss:** What does this teach us about God? What does this mean for the purpose of His people?
11. **Discuss:** What are some good things that people do to try and earn God's love?

ACTIVITY WRAP-UP:

Nothing good that we do for God is done out of a need God has, an attempt to earn God's love, or a way for our sins to be forgiven. The work of Jesus fixes our sin problem. The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christ-follower leads to good work for God's glory. God does not need anything; He loves us and chooses to work through us to accomplish His will.

 Discipleship DISCUSSION**HOW CAN I KNOW THIS IS TRUE?**

Discuss: What is an artifact? What are some examples of artifacts that you've learned about in school?

Say: The Cyrus Cylinder is an archaeological artifact that provides confirmation of the events in Nehemiah 1 and Ezra 1–3. This ancient artifact, dating back to the time of the Persian king Cyrus, contains a decree granting the Jews permission to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple. This aligns perfectly with the biblical accounts. The presence of the Cyrus Cylinder serves as evidence outside the Bible that reinforces that the events of Ezra and Nehemiah really happened and that what the Bible says is really true.

BUT WHAT ABOUT ... EARNING SALVATION?

Discuss: Have you ever heard someone say that you have to do good things to get into heaven?

Discuss: Why do you think people might believe that they can earn entrance into heaven by doing good things?

Discuss: What does the Bible have to say about that?

Say: Many people in our world believe that they can go to heaven by doing more good things than bad things. Some of the major world religions believe this. But Ephesians 2:8–9 says: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* In other words, heaven is a gift from God when we have faith in Jesus. There is absolutely nothing we can do on our own to earn it. In fact, the Bible says in Isaiah 64:6 that all of the good things we do are like dirty rags compared to God's holiness. God does want us to do good things, but we do those out of love and obedience toward Him, not to try to earn His love.



HERE TO SERVE

SUPPLIES:

Bibles, Take-Home page, writing supplies, printable page, painter's tape

PREP:

Print the Take-Home page (1 per kid).
Print the printable pages. Tape the signs in four corners of your space.

ADAPTATION FOR DIFFERENT LEARNERS: If some kids in your group have movement needs, add a few seconds for travel time to prevent injuries.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. **Discuss:** How did the people rebuild the wall? What did God do?
2. **Say:** God worked through His people, and He works through us too!
3. *Lead kids to find Colossians 3:23–24 in their Bibles. Read it aloud together.*
4. **Discuss:** How can God work through us?
5. **Say:** God calls us to share His love and serve others—in our church, in our community and around the world.
6. **Say:** Let's play a game to talk about practical ways we can share God's love and serve others in our lives. In each corner of our space is a sign: home, church, community (school, town, neighborhood) and world. I will close my eyes and count down from 10, and you will choose a corner. Then I will call out a corner.
7. **Say:** The people in that corner will need to share practical ways they can serve others in that area. Then we will play again. As we play, try not to repeat ideas!
8. *Play the game until all the signs have been discussed with the questions below.*
 - **Discuss:** How can you show God's love and serve others at _____?
 - *Ask some questions to challenge the kids: "How can you serve your parents or siblings at home?" "How can you serve your teacher, friends at school or people in your neighborhood?" "How can you serve others at soccer practice?"*
 - **Discuss:** What are you good at? How can you use that to serve others?
9. **Pray:** God, we praise You for who You are. Thank You for loving us and working through us. Help us to serve You with joyful hearts and to share Your love. Amen.
10. **Say:** God works through His people. Let's take time to respond to Him.

ACTIVITY WRAP-UP:

Lead kids to use the "Me Question" box on their Take-Home pages. Ask fun, relationship-building questions while kids wait to be picked up. As parents arrive, connect with them and point out the Take-Home page.



PRAYER CATEGORIES

SUPPLIES:

Bibles, Take-Home page, writing supplies, printable pages, scissors

PREP:

Print the Take-Home page (1 per kid). Print the printable pages and cut out (1 prayer category per kid). Spread the categories randomly on the floor with a writing supply beside each one.

ADAPTATION FOR DIFFERENT LEARNERS: Play quiet worship music in the background to create a calming environment and to increase kids' focus.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. **Discuss:** What was the first thing Nehemiah did when he felt God leading him to rebuild the city walls? Why?
2. **Say:** Nehemiah knew that he could not rebuild the walls in his own power. He asked God to forgive the people and give direction as Nehemiah rebuilt the walls.
3. **Discuss:** How can God work through us?
4. **Say:** God calls us to share His love and serve others—in our church, in our community and around the world.
5. *Lead kids to find Ephesians 2:10 in their Bibles. Read it aloud together.*
6. **Say:** Look at the prayer categories on the floor and think about where God might be leading you to serve Him.
7. **Say:** Quietly walk to the category that fits best, pray for God's strength and wisdom, and write a short prayer on the back.
8. *Give kids time to quietly write their prayers. End your time praying for everyone to serve and love God at church, in their communities and around the world.*
9. **Say:** Take your prayer home as a reminder to pray each day as God works through you.
10. **Pray:** God, we praise You for who You are. Thank You for loving us and working through us. Help us to serve You with joyful hearts and to share Your love. Amen.
11. **Say:** God works through His people. Let's take time to respond to Him.



ACTIVITY WRAP-UP:

Lead kids to use the "Me Question" box on their Take-Home pages. Ask fun, relationship-building questions while kids wait to be picked up. As parents arrive, connect with them and point out the Take-Home page.



HELP WANTED

OLDER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP
THE EXILES RETURN

PAGE 1 OF 1

PREP: Print the printable page and cut out (1 per 2 kids).

WANTED?

ACTS 17:24-25

PURPOSE?

**EPHESIANS 2:10
AND
MATTHEW 5:16**

WHAT?

**EPHESIANS 4:11-12
AND
MATTHEW 28:19-20**

HOW?

COLOSSIANS 3:23-24



HOME



HERE TO SERVE

OLDER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP
THE EXILES RETURN

PAGE 2 OF 4

PREP: Print the printable pages.

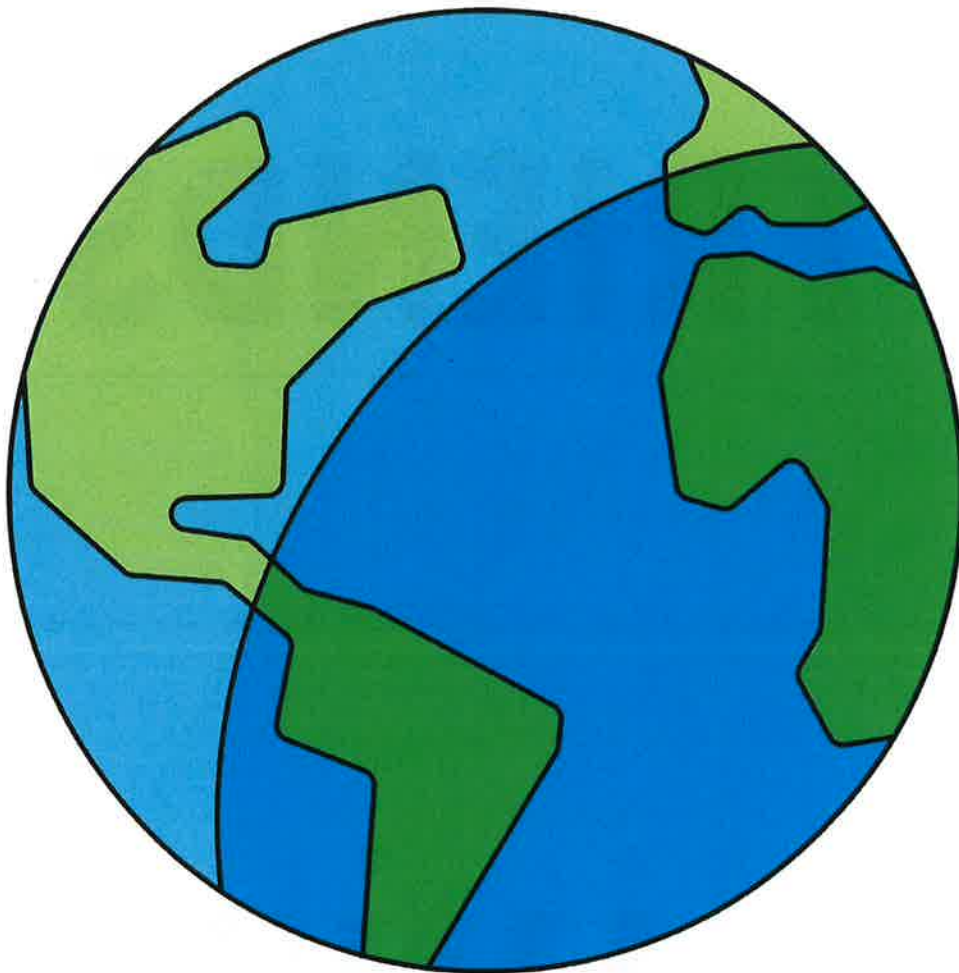


CHURCH



COMMUNITY

(SCHOOL, TOWN, NEIGHBORHOOD)



WORLD



PRAYER CATEGORIES

OLDER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP
THE EXILES RETURN

PAGE 1 OF 3

PREP: Print the printable pages and cut out (1 prayer category per kid).

FRIENDS

FAMILY



PRAYER CATEGORIES

OLDER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP
THE EXILES RETURN

PAGE 2 OF 3

PREP: Print the printable pages and cut out (1 prayer category per kid).

CHURCH

NEIGHBORHOOD



PRAYER CATEGORIES

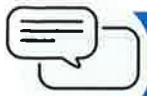
OLDER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP
THE EXILES RETURN

PAGE 3 OF 3

PREP: Print the printable pages and cut out (1 prayer category per kid).

COMMUNITY

SCHOOL



TAKE-HOME

THE EXILES RETURN

BIBLE PASSAGE: EZRA 1-3; 7; NEHEMIAH 1-2 After 70 years in exile, King Cyrus allowed the Israelites to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Ezra led more people back and called them to turn from sin. Nehemiah returned to lead the rebuilding of the city walls. God used His people to restore the city.

POINT TO JESUS: The Israelites were returning to a broken city. Our whole world was broken when Adam and Eve sinned. Our world has pain, hurt, broken relationships, and so many other awful things. Worst of all, our relationship with God is broken. Jesus paid the price for our sin, fixing the sin problem and making it possible for us to live with God forever. And one day, Jesus will restore this whole broken world and make it new.

 **BRITE Idea**

God works through His people.

 **MONTHLY MEMORY VERSE**

*Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,
and His greatness is unsearchable.*

(PSALM 145:3)

FAMILIES, ASK THESE THREE QUESTIONS!

 **WHAT WAS THE MOST INTERESTING
THING YOU LEARNED ABOUT THE EXILES
RETURNING HOME TODAY?**

 **DOES GOD NEED PEOPLE?**
God doesn't need anyone or anything, but He loves us and chooses to involve us in His work.

 **HOW CAN GOD WORK THROUGH US?**
God calls us to share His love and serve others—in our church, in our community, and around the world.

HOW IS GOD INVITING **ME** TO RESPOND?

CHOOSE ONE:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| ☐ I can talk to God about ... | ☐ I wonder ... |
| ☐ I can remember ... | ☐ I can ... |



DRAW OR WRITE YOUR RESPONSE

YOUR FAMILY'S WIN THIS WEEK ...

Make a list of gifts and talents God has given your family. Beside each gift, write ways you can use that gift to serve God.

NAVIGATING A BROKEN WORLD

Earning salvation can be a tough topic for kids. We can help kids view this topic through the lens of Scripture. Learn more about this and how to have a conversation at home here. [Britecurriculum.com/tough-topics](https://www.britecurriculum.com/tough-topics)

**WANT MORE
AT-HOME
DISCIPLESHIP
DISCUSSION?
SCAN ME!**



GOING DEEPER

Read God's Word this week! Read each passage and answer the three questions.

☐ DAY 1

Read: Ezra 1:1-4

HE: What do these verses tell us about God?

WE: What do these verses tell us about people?

ME: How is God inviting me to respond?

?

☐ DAY 2

Read: Nehemiah 2:1-8

HE: What do these verses tell us about God?

WE: What do these verses tell us about people?

ME: How is God inviting me to respond?

?

☐ DAY 3

Read: Philippians 2:12-13

HE: What do these verses tell us about God?

WE: What do these verses tell us about people?

ME: How is God inviting me to respond?

?

☐ DAY 4

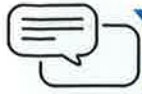
Read: Matthew 5:14-16

HE: What do these verses tell us about God?

WE: What do these verses tell us about people?

ME: How is God inviting me to respond?

?



TAKE-HOME ACTIVITIES

THE EXILES RETURN

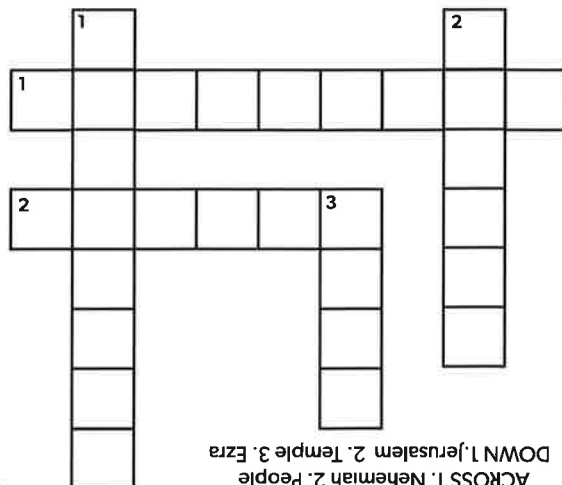
ADD TO THE ILLUSTRATION



CROSSWORD

DOWN

1. The city God's people returned to rebuild after 70 years in exile.
2. The special building the Israelites rebuilt to worship God.
3. The leader who taught God's Word and called the people to turn back to God.



ACROSS 1. Jerusalem 2. Temple 3. Ezra
DOWN 1. Jerusalem 2. Temple 3. Ezra

OBSTRUCTION

- Find a partner. One will be "x" and one will be "o".
- Write your shape in a square. Shade in all the squares around it.
- The next player will write their shape in a square and shade the squares around it.
- The first player who can't make a move loses!

