



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:

HE

DOES GOD NEED PEOPLE?

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

WE

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.

ME

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

Large Group ROADMAP

1**WELCOME****(8 MINUTES)**

SUPPLIES: Video player, Intro Video, teaching slides, printable pages, paper, coloring supplies

2**FIND IT IN
THE BIBLE****(2 MINUTES)**

SUPPLIES: Bibles, teaching slides

3**BIBLE
TEACHING****(10 MINUTES)****THE EXILES RETURN
(EZRA 1-3; 7; NEHEMIAH 1-2)**

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

4**REVIEW****(8 MINUTES)**

SUPPLIES: Video player, Bible Review Video, teaching slides

5**LARGE GROUP
WRAP-UP****(5 MINUTES)**

SUPPLIES: Video player, Memory Verse Video, teaching slides

Welcome



Choose three groups of five volunteers to come to the front. Have each group stand in a line facing forward. Give the first person in each line a piece of paper and a coloring supply.

Say: I will silently show the last person in each line a simple picture. They will trace that picture on the back of the person in front of them using their finger. Each person will pass along what they feel until it reaches the front. The first person will draw what they think the picture is.

Show the picture to the last person in each line and begin. When all drawings are finished, hold them up and have the rest of the group vote on which is closest to the original. Play all four rounds, selecting new teams each time if time allows.

Say: Working through people can be tough! That's what makes today's Brite Idea so amazing: God works through His people.

SUPPLIES:

Video player, Intro Video, teaching slides, printable page, paper, coloring supplies

PREP:

Print the printable page and cut apart.

LEADER TIP:

For smaller groups, let everyone play! Divide the entire group into lines of five or six kids.



INTRO VIDEO

Play Intro Video then transition into discussion.

Say: I didn't know astronauts can grow food in space!

Discuss: If you were on the Space Station, what food would you like to grow and eat?

Say: Just as astronauts work together to grow food that helps everyone on the Space Station, God chooses to work through His people to help others and share His love. Today's Brite Idea is: God works through His people.

Show teaching slide: Brite Idea

Show teaching slide: He/We/Me Questions

TODAY WE WILL ANSWER THESE TWO QUESTIONS:



Does God need people?



How can God work through us?

AT THE END OF OUR TIME TODAY, THE QUESTION YOU WILL BE ABLE TO ANSWER IS:



How is God inviting me to respond?

FIND IT
IN THE

Bible

WHAT IS GOD'S BIGGER STORY?

Show teaching slide: God's Big Story

Say: The Bible is real and true. God gave us the Bible so we could know Him. The Bible is filled with many books and stories, but they are all a part of one BIG story — God's story.

Creation: God is the one true God and He has always existed. He is the Creator of all things, including you and me. He is good, He loves us, and we are made in His image.

Fall: Adam and Eve sinned and disobeyed God. Sin broke the world, and people were separated from God. People could not fix their sin problem on their own.

Redemption: God sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross, to take the punishment for our sins, and to rise from the dead to conquer death. When we trust in Jesus as our Savior, our relationship with God is made right again through His grace, and He gives us new life.

Restoration: When we walk with Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit and learn God's Word, He renews us. One day, Jesus will return to renew all things.

WHERE IS TODAY'S BIBLE STORY?

Show teaching illustration: Fire Falls on the Mountain.

Say: This month began with Elijah on Mt. Carmel and how the Lord is the one true God.

Show teaching illustration: Jonah Swallowed by the Fish.

Say: Then we studied Jonah and discovered together that God gives grace.

Show teaching illustration: God's Throne and Robe Fills the Temple.

Say: Two weeks ago we learned about Isaiah's call and that God is holy.

Show teaching illustration: Fourth Man in the Fire.

Say: Last week in the fiery furnace we discovered only God is worthy of worship.

Show teaching slide: Books of the Bible.

Say: This week's story comes from the book of Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra and Nehemiah can be found between the books of 2 Chronicles and Esther.

Show teaching slide: Find It in the Bible Timeline.

Say: This story falls in the "Times of Trouble" period of the Bible. Today's true story tells us what happened when some of the Israelite people returned from captivity.

Show teaching slide: Biblical Theme.

Say: This month we are focusing on the truth that God is greater than anything.

Say: This week we are learning that God works through His people.

LET'S FIND IT IN OUR BIBLES!

Show kids the title page for the books of Ezra and Nehemiah in your Bible. Help kids turn in their Bibles to today's Bible passage (Ezra 1–3; 7; Nehemiah 1–2).

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.



BIBLE REVIEW VIDEO

Play Bible Review Video. Play the game below using teaching slides: Review Game

SUPPLIES:

Video player, Bible Review Video, teaching slides

PREP:

Designate one side of your space as "Temple" and the other "Wall."

INSTRUCTIONS: Kids will walk to either the "Temple" or the "Wall" to indicate their answer.

- 1. Even though Israel's disobedience led to captivity, did God forget about His people?**

Temple: Yes

Wall: No

God worked through many people to return the exiles home.

- 2. How did people respond once the foundation for the temple was laid?**

Temple: They praised God and sang with great joy.

Wall: They quit and returned to Babylon.

- 3. When Nehemiah prayed and asked for God's help to rebuild Jerusalem's walls, who noticed he was sad?**

Temple: Ezra

Wall: King Artaxerxes

- 4. Can we work hard enough or do enough good works to fix our broken world?**

Temple: Yes

Wall: No

One day Jesus will restore this whole broken world and make it new.

- 5. Does God need people?**

Temple: No

Wall: Yes

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

- 6. How can God work through us?**

Temple: We can share His love and serve others.

Wall: We can impress others with our talents.

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



Wrap – Up

Show teaching slide: Brite Idea



SUPPLIES:

Video player, Memory Verse Video, teaching slides

PREP:

None

Show teaching slide: He Question and Answer



Does God need people?

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

Show teaching slide: We Question and Answer



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.



MONTHLY Memory Verse

Choose an older kid to look up the verse and read it aloud to the group. Have the whole group repeat it together.

Show teaching slide: Memory Verse

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

(PSALM 145:3)



VERSE VIDEO

Play Memory Verse Video
after the verse is read.



PRAY: God, You don't need us, yet You choose to love us and work through us. By Your power, help us share Your love and serve others faithfully this week. Amen.