



Ten-Minute Family Devotional

week seventy six

The Exiles Return

Make a bunch of muffins and set a timer for when you should take them out of the oven. Call your children into the kitchen about three to five minutes before the timer goes off. Explain that you are the maker of the muffins and by your own strength you placed them in the oven. Also, you have determined that they will remain in the oven for ____ minutes (however long is left). You have also arranged that a timer will go off at the proper time.

When the timer goes off, take the muffins out and invite each of them to have one. While they are enjoying the treat, explain that we do have control—in a limited way—over some things like the muffins, but God controls all things.

Say, “This week we will learn that God planned the captivity of Israel, decided how long his people would remain in Babylon, and moved the heart of a king to allow his people to return home and rebuild Jerusalem.”

day one

Picture It

Imagine that Mom or Dad came home from work on Friday and told you to go to bed early because, before dawn the next morning, you were leaving for a surprise: a three-day vacation!

If we told you that, would you believe us? If you are like most kids, you would trust and not doubt at all. The moment we announced the vacation you would start to celebrate. Then the next morning, when you woke up, you would excitedly try to guess where you were going.

You would never think that we may be lying to you because we have always treated you honestly and kept our word and promises.

In our Bible story today, we see that God always keeps his promises. First, we'll read a promise God made to his people through the prophet Jeremiah, and then we'll see how God kept his promise. Did you know God is even more trustworthy than our own parents? He has never ever broken a promise. So if he says in the Bible that he will do something, we can trust that he will keep his promise.



Read Jeremiah 29:7 – 14 and Ezra 1.

Think About It Some More

God used Nebuchadnezzar to teach his people a lesson. When they refused to listen to the warnings he gave them through the prophets, he used Nebuchadnezzar to swoop in, defeat Jerusalem, and take his people away as captives to Babylon. But the whole time God's people were captives in Babylon, God protected them.

In our first Bible passage today, we learned that God planned to rescue his people from Babylon after 70 years. Remember back when God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, how he hardened Pharaoh's heart and used Moses to deliver them? In this story, he did the opposite with the king's heart: he softened the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia, to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild God's temple. Cyrus even gave the people of Israel all the money they needed to rebuild the temple, and returned all the things from the temple that king Nebuchadnezzar had taken when he attacked Jerusalem.

Talk About It

Who moved the heart of King Cyrus to rebuild the temple?

God moved the heart of King Cyrus to rebuild the temple.

What did King Cyrus tell the people of Babylon to give the Jews as they left?

Cyrus told them to give the Jews silver and gold, animals for the journey, and money to rebuild the temple. Parents, remind your children of the similarity in the story to when the people of God left Egypt and received gifts of silver and gold. Notice that it seems the people of Babylon gave gladly (verse 6).

What can we learn from these two Bible passages about God?

We can clearly see that God is in control of kings and even all the people under them. We also learn that, in spite of our sin, God cares for us. Finally, we learn that God keeps his promises.

Pray About It

Praise God for always keeping his promises.

day two

Remember It

What do you remember about yesterday's story? What do you think is going to happen today?



Read Ezra 3:1 – 7.

Think About It Some More

Once the people of Israel had settled back in their homes, they gathered in Jerusalem and rebuilt the altar there. You may remember, the reason they were captured by Babylon is because they were following the false idols of the people around them. But now, it seems they have learned their lesson. They didn't rebuild the high places around Jerusalem, nor did they make an altar to Baal. They rebuilt God's altar in the place where it was supposed to be and offered sacrifices to the Lord according to the directions God gave to them through Moses.

Talk About It

What lesson did God's people learn by getting captured and held in Babylon for 70 years?

The people learned that it is wrong to worship idols and idols can't help you. When they returned to Jerusalem they didn't rebuild the high places or altars to false gods.

What were the people of God afraid of?

The people of God were afraid of the other people in the land. They still had enemies who would not like them to rebuild their temple.

Why wasn't it safe in Jerusalem?

All the walls had been broken down by Nebuchadnezzar. If someone wanted to attack God's people, they would be in danger with no protection from the walls. But God protected them.

Pray About It

Ask God to protect your family from any danger you might face.

day three

Connect It To Jesus

Can anyone guess how our story is about Jesus or points forward to him?



Read Ezra 3:8 – 13.

Think About It Some More

Some of the people of God who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon were very old. If a boy had been a ten-year-old when he was first captured, he would be an eighty-year-old now, after the 70 years of captivity in Babylon.

Those older men remembered how beautiful Solomon's temple was before it was destroyed. That's why they were sad and crying. But their children, who had grown up in Babylon, had never seen Solomon's temple, so they rejoiced when the foundation was laid.

Even though the new temple was not as big and beautiful, something very special would one day there. Jesus would visit this new temple. He would walk across the very foundation they were laying. The older men had good reason to be sad, but if they had only known that Jesus was going to teach in the rebuilt temple, heal the sick there, and teach about the gospel, they would have rejoiced instead of cried.

Talk About It

Why did the young men rejoice when the temple foundation was finished?

They rejoiced because they could build the walls and have a temple again. The temple was where the presence of God lived on earth.

Why did the older men cry?

The older men remembered Solomon's temple and knew the new temple would not be as large or as beautiful, so they were sad.

What made the temple more special than any other building?

God's presence living in the temple is what made it special. It wasn't just a building; it was where God came down to be with his people.

What would have cheered the older men up?

If the older men had known that one day Jesus, God's Son, was going to come down to their temple and live and teach there, they would have been very excited.

Pray About It

Thank God for bringing his people out of Babylon and help them rebuild the temple.

day four

Remember It

What has God been teaching you this week through our Bible story?



Read Ezra 4:1 – 5 and 17 – 24.

Think About It Some More

Before Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, it was a strong city with high walls all around it. But after the battle, Nebuchadnezzar broke down the walls, burned the temple, and destroyed the homes inside the city.

Without its high walls, and with all the strong young men captured, Israel's enemies were happy. They knew that without the walls or an army Israel could not attack them. But now, as we see in our story today, thousands of God's people had returned. They were rebuilding the temple and the walls of the city. This made Israel's enemies afraid again.

Israel's enemies offered to help them so they could see what was going on. But Zerubbabel refused. So Israel's enemies complained to the king, who then ordered the work to be stopped. That discouraged God's people. But they obeyed the king's order and stopped working on the temple and the wall and started rebuilding their homes instead.

Talk About It

KIDS, ask your parents if anyone ever tried to stop them from doing something.

Parents, try to remember a time when a neighbor didn't want you to put up a fence, or a boss didn't want to put up a picture at work; or perhaps you can remember a story from when you were a child and a fellow student tried to stop you from doing something. Even if you don't have a story, help your children identify with the people of God who were afraid.

Why didn't Israel's enemies want them to rebuild Jerusalem?

Israel's enemies knew that once the walls of the city were finished, Israel would grow strong again. As long as the walls were down, the people of Jerusalem were weak and could not easily fight off an attack.

What mistake did the people of Jerusalem make?

They became afraid and stopped the work on the city. They should have known that God is more powerful than their enemies.

Pray about It

Thank God for his great strength and promise to trust in God when you are afraid.

day five

Discover It

Today we look at a passage from a psalm or one of the prophets to see what we can learn from it about Jesus.



Read Haggai 2:6 – 9 and John 2:19 – 22.

Think About It Some More

This Bible story took place when God's people were rebuilding Solomon's temple. Those who were old enough to remember the old temple were sad because the new one was not as nice. But Haggai, one of God's prophets, told them that one day the glory of God's temple would be even greater than it was in Solomon's day. That gave the people of Israel hope that one day a great temple would be built again.

But what they didn't know was that Haggai wasn't talking about building a bigger building or one with more decorations. He was talking about Jesus. When Jesus came, he said his body was the true temple of God. And when we become a Christian, God's Spirit comes to live inside of us so we become a part of God's temple too. Having God's Spirit live in our hearts is way better than having him live in a building.

So you see, Haggai was right: the latter glory of God's temple is much greater than its former glory.

Talk About It

Who was Haggai talking about when he said that God's temple would be even greater than it was in Solomon's day?

Haggai was talking about when God would send his Son to earth to be born as Jesus.

Why did Jesus say he was God's temple?

Since Jesus was God, anywhere he went God was living with his people.

Where does God live today?

God lives in the heart of every person who believes; together we make up the church where God lives among all his people.

Pray About It

Ask God to save each member of your family so they can become a part of God's temple too.