

Unit 17: The People Return

Unit Description: God’s time of disciplining His people had been completed, and true to His word, He returned them to the land of promise. Once there, they began to rebuild the temple—the important reminder that God was with them, that He is faithful, and that He can always be trusted.

Big Picture Question: Can God be trusted? Yes, God cannot lie or ever be wrong, so we can trust whatever He has said.



SESSION 1: God Delivered His People

Ezra 1



SESSION 2: Zechariah Gave Hope

Zechariah 13–14



SESSION 3: The People Rebuilt the Temple

Ezra 2–6



SESSION 4: God Can Always Be Trusted

Jeremiah 31



UNIT 17 | SESSION 1

GOD DELIVERED HIS PEOPLE

EZRA 1

KEY PASSAGE:

Jeremiah 17:7

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:

Can God be trusted? Yes, God cannot lie or ever be wrong, so we can trust whatever He has said.

CHRIST CONNECTION:

God always keeps His promises. God chose to use King Cyrus in His plan to graciously deliver His people from exile. King Cyrus' action to free the people reminds us of Jesus, whom God chose to rescue sinners and bring us to our true home in His kingdom of grace.



PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION



LEADER Bible Study

Rest. It’s a word that means something different to each one of us. For some, rest brings to mind a desire to momentarily break from the chaos of life to sleep, relax, and even recover. For others, rest is an unrealistic hope as they navigate a non-stop schedule of busyness. Yet for others, the word rest suggests an uneventful, quiet life of the mundane.

Whether it’s a nap, a vacation, or boredom that comes to mind when you think of rest, it is likely a word that triggers some desire or response. And almost universally, the thought of rest is primarily physical.

The Bible teaches that rhythms of rest are good and necessary for us; however, the Bible’s primary teaching on rest refers to the spiritual. In Ezra 1, God’s remnant is instructed to recover from their exile with ... work.

This work would be costly, demanding, and long; but this work actually aimed to bring rest. How could this be so? Because their work was to build the place where they would encounter the living God, the One who gives true rest to the soul.

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take up my yoke and learn from me, because I am lowly and

humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

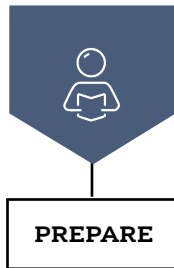
Though God clearly teaches us the benefits of a rhythm of physical rest—Sabbath—He ultimately uses physical rest to teach us of our need for a greater spiritual rest—a rest for our soul, a rest that comes in understanding that we cannot save ourselves. God has done everything necessary through Christ to save us. We are invited into this rest through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus.

The people of God are instructed in Ezra 1 to begin the arduous work of building God’s dwelling place. But this work would ultimately lead to their place of rest—in God’s presence.

We too may find ourselves physically exhausted from the demanding work of faithfully following the Lord in the context He has placed us. But take heart, there is rest for your soul in the presence of God and the person of Christ.

PEOPLE TO KNOW

Ezra: priest and scribe sent to Jerusalem by the king of Persia. Ezra led reforms after Israel’s return from exile and helped preserve and teach Jewish law.



PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

GATHER Supplies

Keep a regular supply of the following items available at all times: Bibles, pens or pencils, markers, crayons, colored pencils, scissors, glue or tape, paper.



WELCOME

Activity Page

- “Word Puzzle” activity page

Session Starter (Option 1)

- timer

Session Starter (Option 2)

- paper bowls, 2
- aluminum foil



LEARN

Introduce the Session

- countdown video

Big Picture Question

- Big Picture Question Poster

Review the Timeline

- Giant Timeline

Tell the Bible Story

- “God Delivered His People” video
- Bible Story Picture Poster
- Old Testament Mediterranean Map (optional)
- Bible story props (optional)

Questions from Kids

- “Unit 17, Session 1” questions from kids video

Missions Moment

- “Hudson Taylor Photo” printable

Key Passage Activity

- Key Passage Poster
- “Trust In the Lord (Jeremiah 17:7)” song
- worship song of your choice (optional)
- timer



LOVE

Review & Bible skills

- Small Group Timeline and Map Set
- world map



LIVE

Activity Choice (Option 1)

- “China Flag” printable, 1 per kid

Activity Choice (Option 2)

- Big Picture Question Poster

Journal and Prayer

- Journal Page
- “Complete the Story” activity page



WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

SAY “ If you had to move to a new country and could move anywhere in the world, where would you move? Why? ”

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete “Word Puzzle” on the activity page.

SAY “ God’s people spent 70 years away from home in Babylon, just like God warned them would happen. However, God also promised to bring His people back home. The time had finally come for God to fulfill this promise. ”

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: PREPARE FOR A TRIP



Form teams of two to four kids. Distribute a piece of paper and a pencil to each team. Prompt kids to designate one team member to be the writer for their team.

Explain to kids that when the timer starts, they should list things they need for a trip. Tell kids that each object must start with the last letter of the previous item. For example, raft, toothbrush, hat, etc. Start a timer for three minutes. When the timer ends, compare lists to see which team came up with the most items.

SAY “ We could pack a variety of things for a trip. In today’s Bible story, God’s people prepared to travel back to Jerusalem. God kept His promise to free them from exile, and He also provided everything they needed for their journey. ”

OPTION 2: BOWL PASS

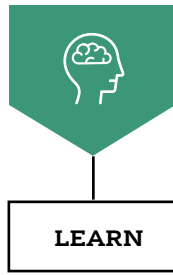
Before the session, cover two paper bowls with aluminum foil. Use scrap pieces of paper to make two sets of the phrase, God keeps His promises. Write each word of the phrase on separate pieces of scrap paper.

Form the kids into two teams and ask them to line up single file. Put one scrap paper in each bowl and hand the bowl to the first kid in each line. Direct the teams to pass the bowl all the way down the line. Lead the last kid in each line to take out the scrap paper and pass the bowl back to the front of the line. Continue adding paper and passing the bowls, until one team is the first to receive all of the scrap papers. Lead the kid at the end of each line to read the message aloud.

SAY “ In today’s Bible story, God kept His promise to free His people from exile. God also provided His people with the materials they would need to rebuild the temple. Some of those items were 1,000 silver basins. Let’s read our story to learn more. ”

Transition from **WELCOME** to **LEARN**





THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCE the Bible Story

1 INTRODUCE THE SESSION (3 minutes)

Show the countdown video as you transition to introduce the Bible story. Set it to end as the session begins.

SAY “ Hi, everyone! I’m so glad you’re here today! My name is [your name]. I brought my Bible with me this morning. If you brought your Bible, too, hold it up so I can see! [Distribute Bibles to kids who need one.] The Bible teaches us about who God is. One of the things God tells us about Himself is that He keeps His promises.

God always tells the truth and always does what He says. Our Bible story today is found in the Book of Ezra. The words of this book remind us of a promise God made and how that promise came true. We will learn that God cannot lie and that whatever He promises, He will do. ”

2 BIG PICTURE QUESTION (1 minute)

SAY “ Today, we will learn a new big picture question and answer. What do you think the word trust means? [Allow kids to respond.] Trust means believing that someone can and will do what they say they will do. Our big picture question is, **Can God be trusted?** Do you think He can be trusted? [Allow kids to respond.] Our big picture answer is, **Yes, God cannot lie or ever be wrong, so we can trust whatever He has said.**

Not only does God always keep His word, He is powerful enough to do everything He says. God’s promises would be impossible for us to keep, but God always keeps His promises. Let’s say our big picture question and answer together. **Can God be trusted? Yes, God cannot lie or ever be wrong, so we can trust whatever He has said.** ”

3 REVIEW THE TIMELINE (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

SAY “ God’s people did not always trust God. Even when God spoke to them through the prophets, they ignored His words and disobeyed. God told them what would happen if they did not repent of their sin. God told them they would be sent away in exile. Did God’s words come true? [Allow responses.] Yes, they did. But God also promised that He would be with them. And He was! God also promised that He would send Immanuel into the world so God’s people could be with Him forever. **God cannot lie or ever be wrong, so we can trust whatever He has said.** Let’s read our Bible story to learn more about how we can trust God. ”



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LEARN the Bible Story

1 TELL THE BIBLE STORY: VIDEO OR STORYTELLER (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Ezra 1. Use the Bible storytelling tips to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “God Delivered His People.” Use the bold text to retell or review the story.

GOD DELIVERED HIS PEOPLE

“ God’s people had been living in Babylon for decades. **King Nebuchadnezzar had completely destroyed Jerusalem. Many of God’s people had died. Others lived in Babylon. Some of their children and grandchildren were born in Babylon and grew up there. But Babylon was not their home.**

Before God’s people were taken away from Judah, **God promised through the prophet Jeremiah that the exile would last 70 years; then God would bring His people back to the land. At last, the time had come for God’s people to go home.**

Cyrus, king of Persia, had taken over Babylon. God gave Cyrus an idea. **Cyrus made an announcement: “God wants me to build Him a temple in Jerusalem, so let all of God’s people go back to Jerusalem so they can rebuild the Lord’s temple. Anyone who stays behind should give the travelers anything they need—gold and silver, animals, and gifts for God’s temple.”**

The exile was over! God’s people were free to go back to their homes. **God’s promise was coming true. So the people got ready to go to Judah. All their neighbors helped them by giving them gifts:** gold and silver, animals, and other expensive things.

King Cyrus even brought out the dishes that King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem before he destroyed it. The king’s treasurer counted them: 30 gold basins; 1,000 silver basins; 29 silver knives; 30 gold bowls; 410 silver bowls; and 1,000 other pieces. In all, there were 5,400 pieces of gold and silver.

The leader of God’s people—a man named Sheshbazzar (shesh BAZ uhr)—brought all these things along when the captives returned from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Christ Connection: God always keeps His promises. God chose to use King Cyrus in His plan to graciously deliver His people from exile. King Cyrus’ action to free the people reminds us of Jesus, whom God chose to rescue sinners and bring us to our true home in His kingdom of grace. ”

STORYTELLING TIPS

Display a map: Use the Old Testament Mediterranean Map to point out key places in the story like Babylon (E11), Jerusalem (G10), and Persia (E12).

Use props: Gather items such as basins, bowls, utensils, and animal figurines and display the items when they appear in the story.



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

SAY “ When God’s people turned away from Him, God removed them from the land that He had given them. Their exile to Babylon was meant to teach them to turn back to God and worship Him alone. But God promised that one day they would be free.

Who convinced King Cyrus of Persia to let God’s people return to Jerusalem? **[Allow responses.]** Look at Ezra 1:1. **[Choose a volunteer to read aloud Ezra 1:1.]** God moved King Cyrus’ heart. God kept His promise to return His people to Jerusalem after 70 years of exile. God’s promises and plans will always succeed. God even moved the heart of King Cyrus to send the people back to rebuild the temple.

What did God’s people get to take back with them to Jerusalem? Look at Ezra 1:6-7. **[Choose a volunteer to read aloud Ezra 1:6-7.]** God provided everything they would need to rebuild the temple! God not only can be trusted to keep His promises, but He can also be trusted to provide what we need.

God’s great promise to save sinners also came true. God provides for our salvation through Jesus and has promised that in Him we find forgiveness of our sin. ”

3 CHRIST CONNECTION

SAY “ God always keeps His promises. God chose to use King Cyrus in His plan to graciously deliver His people from exile. King Cyrus’ action to free the people reminds us of Jesus, whom God chose to rescue sinners and bring us to our true home in His kingdom of grace. ”

(Tip: Use Scripture and the Gospel Plan Poster to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.)

4 QUESTIONS FROM KIDS (3 minutes)

Show the “Unit 17, Session 1” questions from kids video. Prompt kids to discuss:

1. What should we do when others break their promises or lie? Can we still trust them?
2. Why can you always trust God?

5 MISSIONS MOMENT (3 minutes)

Show the photo as you tell the kids about Hudson Taylor.

SAY “ Hudson Taylor lived many years ago. At the age of 21, he sailed from his home in England to China. It took five and a half months for him to arrive in Shanghai, China. His parents had always been fascinated with East Asia, and they prayed when Hudson was just a newborn baby that he would someday work for God in China.

Hudson spent his teenage years preparing to go to China by learning about medicine and studying Mandarin, a language spoken in China. He also spent time reading his Bible and praying. When



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

Hudson arrived in Shanghai, he only stayed there for a few months before he and another man set off for other areas of China. One time, Hudson and his friend set sail down the Huangpu River and distributed Chinese Bibles and tracts to people they met along the way. ”

Pray, thanking God for missionaries who have served in the past and who serve now to tell people all over the world about Jesus.

6 KEY PASSAGE ACTIVITY (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead kids in reading aloud Jeremiah 17:7 together.

SAY “ Jeremiah reminds us that we can always trust God. When we trust God, we can live joyfully and without fear! ”

Form teams of four to six kids and instruct them to spread out around the room. Set a timer for two minutes. Direct kids to make a dance or motions to go with the key passage. When the two minutes are up, encourage teams to take turns performing for the group.

Lead kids to sing “Trust In the Lord (Jeremiah 17:7).” You may also choose to sing a worship song of your choice.

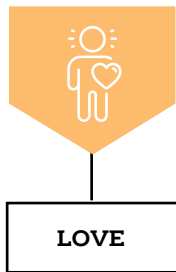
7 PRAY (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before transitioning to Love.

SAY “ God, thank You for always doing what You say You will do. Forgive us when we disobey or don’t believe You. Help us trust You more and live joyfully in the knowledge of Your faithfulness and truth. Amen. ”

Transition from **LEARN** to **LOVE**





THE GOD OF THE GOSPEL

LOVE God by Applying the Story

1 REVIEW & BIBLE SKILLS (5 minutes)

Distribute Bibles and display the Old Testament Mediterranean Map. Guide kids to open their Bibles to Ezra 1. Explain that Ezra is a book in the Old Testament and that it provides details about the return of God's people from exile. Point out the location of Babylon (E11) and Jerusalem (G10) on the Old Testament Mediterranean Map to show the people's return journey from captivity.

Consider comparing the Old Testament Mediterranean Map to a modern-day map to help kids understand where these stories took place. (Tip: Locate the areas in and around modern-day Israel.)

Choose a volunteer to read aloud Ezra 1:3.

SAY “ God kept His word, provided for His people, and was with them during their return to Jerusalem. God does the same for us and provides everything we need at exactly the right time. He already provided salvation once and for all through His Son, Jesus. Jesus miraculously came to earth, died on the cross, and rose from the dead to pay the cost of our sin. We no longer have to be separated from God when we trust Jesus as our Savior. **Can God be trusted?** Let's say the answer together. **Yes, God cannot lie or ever be wrong, so we can trust whatever He has said.** ”

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

| **SAY** “ Why did God remove His people from the land and let them go back 70 years later? ”

Explain to kids that God's people had turned away from Him and continued to reject His words. Lead kids to think about how God disciplines those He loves and wants them to turn back to Him. Remind kids that God kept His promise of hope and brought His people home.

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Jer. 30:11.)

| **SAY** “ Why do difficult situations often help us turn back or grow closer to God? ”

Encourage kids to remember that difficult situations give us an opportunity to trust God in ways we might not otherwise. Remind kids that we can trust God to provide everything we need.

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Matt. 6:25.)

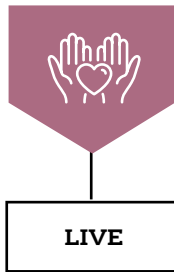
| **SAY** “ How should we respond when God proves His faithfulness? ”

Remind kids that we should respond in worship and thanksgiving. Encourage kids to think of ways they could show God their gratitude—thanking God in prayer, singing in worship, serving others, giving to those in need, etc.

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Ps. 100:4-5.)

Transition from **LOVE** to **LIVE**





THE MISSION OF THE GOSPEL

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: CHINA FLAG



Print a copy of the flag for each child on heavyweight paper. Give each child a copy of the flag. Provide red and yellow crayons, markers, or colored pencils. Explain to the kids that the China flag is red with one larger yellow star and four smaller yellow stars. Direct kids to color in the flag of China. Suggest that kids write Hudson Taylor, Missionary to China from 1854 to 1905 on the back of their flags.

SAY “ Take your flag home and put it in a place where you will be reminded to pray for the people of China and for the missionaries who are serving in China. We can ask God to help the people of China know and believe Jesus. We can also pray that God would send more missionaries to China and other countries around the world so that everyone has an opportunity to hear the gospel. ”

OPTION 2: GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES



Write the following references on individual slips of paper: Genesis 17:19; Genesis 21:2-3; 1 Samuel 16:10-13; 2 Samuel 5:3-4; Genesis 3:15; Hebrews 2:14-15; Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18; John 2:19; Matthew 28:5-9.

Form 10 small groups of kids and distribute a reference to each group. Direct each group to look up the verses in their Bibles. Explain that each of the verses is either a promise made by God or a promise kept by God. Lead teams to work together to match God's promise with its fulfillment.

SAY “ God shows us all throughout the Bible that He keeps His word. **Can God be trusted? Yes, God cannot lie or ever be wrong, so we can trust whatever He has said.** ”

2 JOURNAL AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page. As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas.

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

Review the gospel and encourage kids to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions. Then pray, praising God for keeping His promise to rescue sinners and sending Jesus to save us from our sin. As time allows, lead kids to complete “Complete the Story” on the activity page.



JOURNAL PAGE

1. What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
2. What does this story teach me about myself?
3. Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
4. Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
5. How does this story help me to live on mission better?



Unit 17 • Session 1

GOD DELIVERED HIS PEOPLE

Ezra 1

**CAN GOD BE TRUSTED? YES, GOD CANNOT LIE OR EVER BE WRONG,
SO WE CAN TRUST WHATEVER HE HAS SAID.**

King Nebuchadnezzar had completely destroyed Jerusalem. Many of God's people had died. Others lived in Babylon. Some of their children and grandchildren were born in Babylon and grew up there. But Babylon was not their home.

God promised through the prophet Jeremiah that the exile would last 70 years. At last, the time had come for God's people to go home.

Cyrus, king of Persia, had taken over Babylon. Cyrus made an announcement: "God wants me to build Him a temple in Jerusalem, so let all of God's people go back to Jerusalem so they can rebuild the Lord's temple. Anyone who stays behind should give the travelers anything they need—gold and silver, animals, and gifts for God's temple."

The exile was over! God's promise was coming true. So the people got ready to go to Judah. All their neighbors helped them by giving them gifts.

King Cyrus even brought out the dishes that King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem before he destroyed it.

The leader of God's people—a man named Sheshbazzar—brought all these things along when the captives returned from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Christ Connection: God always keeps His promises. God chose to use King Cyrus in His plan to graciously deliver His people from exile. King Cyrus' action to free the people reminds us of Jesus, whom God chose to rescue sinners and bring us to our true home in His kingdom of grace.

FOLD

Word Puzzle | Complete the word puzzle using the hints. Then use the circled letters to find the missing word in the sentence below.



1. J _ _ D A ()

2. _ _ A _ _ Y L () N

3. J _ _ R U _ _ A _ _ E ()

4. () Z R _ _

The Southern Kingdom of Israel

The place God's people were exiled to for 70 years

The place where God's temple was

The book of the Bible between 2 Chronicles and Nehemiah

"GOD'S PEOPLE WERE FREE TO GO BACK _____."

Complete the Story | Use the pictures below to write today's Bible story in your own words.



NAME: _____



the **GOSPEL** PROJECT.

God Delivered His People

BIBLE STORY SUMMARY:

- God's people had been living in Babylon, but Babylon was not their home.
- God had promised that He would bring His people back to Judah. It was time for God's people to go home.
- King Cyrus gave God's people gifts like gold, silver, and animals. After 70 years, the exile was over!

CHRIST CONNECTION:

God always keeps His promises. God chose to use King Cyrus in His plan to graciously deliver His people from exile. King Cyrus' action to free the people reminds us of Jesus, whom God chose to rescue sinners and bring us to our true home in His kingdom of grace.

KEY PASSAGE: Jeremiah 17:7

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:

Can God be trusted? Yes, God cannot lie or ever be wrong, so we can trust whatever He has said.

