

Aim of lesson

To learn from Zerubbabel about working for God, working together and encouraging one another.

Bible background

Ezra 1; 2:1-2, 68-70; 4:1-5; 5; 6.

Outline of lesson

The proclamation of Cyrus

One of the answers to Daniel's prayer, noted on last week's lesson, was the proclamation of Cyrus that the Jews could go back to their land and rebuild the Temple. This lesson looks at what happened following that proclamation.

The return

The workbook can be used to develop the outline of the events which took place. The class can put the twenty squares in the correct order, either by numbering them, or by cutting up a photocopy of the page and re-arranging the squares on a blank sheet of paper. They could do this by hunting through the first six chapters of Ezra, or they could look specifically at the references in the workbooks.

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| 1. Ezra 1:1 | 11. Ezra 3:7 |
| 2. Ezra 1:5 | 12. Ezra 3:7 |
| 3. Ezra 1:6 | 13. Ezra 3:1 0 |
| 4. Ezra 1:7-8 | 14. Ezra 4:4-5 |
| 5. Ezra 2:1 | 15. Ezra 4:24 |
| 6. Ezra 2:1 | 16. Ezra 5:1-2 |
| 7. Ezra 2:68 | 17. Ezra 5:3-7 |
| 8. Ezra 2:68 | 18. Ezra 6:1-13 |
| 9. Ezra 3:2 | 19. Ezra 6:14-15 |
| 10. Ezra 3:4 | 20. Ezra 6:16 |

The correct order of the squares is as follows:

1. Cyrus makes a proclamation.
2. The people get ready to go.
3. Neighbours give gold and valuables.
4. Cyrus gives them the Temple articles.
5. They set off for Jerusalem.
6. A long journey from Babylon to Jerusalem.
7. They arrive in Jerusalem.
8. The heads of families give gold for rebuilding the Temple.
9. Joshua and Zerubbabel build the altar.
10. They celebrate the feast of Tabernacles.
11. They commission masons and carpenters.
12. They order cedar logs from Lebanon.
13. The foundation of the Temple is laid.
14. The people around discourage them.
15. Work on the Temple stops.
16. Haggai and Zechariah prophesy and encourage them.
17. Nearby officials write to Darius to have the building stopped.
18. Darius writes to support the work.
19. The Temple is finished.
20. All celebrate the dedication of the Temple.

Encouragement and discouragement

After the class have sorted the squares you could ask them to consider which of the events would have discouraged the builders and why. These were people who knew they were doing God's will, and yet they were put off by the opinions and plots of the people around. Ask the class how they can be influenced away from doing God's will by the opinions and criticism of people around us. The class should consider what encouraged them in their task of rebuilding. Other people's company and enthusiasm, as well as success can encourage us too. The class could consider their own enthusiasm and support of others.

Digging deeper

Prophets of the return

This is an overview of the last three books of the Old Testament: how they fit with the time of the return, and a promise for the future.

Relevance to our lives

The class could keep a record of things which during the week encourage them to do God's will, and things which discourage them. Compare notes before next week's lesson.

Prayer

The class could each choose a different square, and consider the prayer Zerubbabel might have made at that point.

Other suggestions for activities

- The squares can be used to form a board game. An equal number of blank squares can be used to set between the ones from the workbook. All the squares should be pasted on to a board in the manner of the squares on a snakes and ladders board. The 'story' squares should be in order. The 'discouraging' squares should be coloured differently from the 'encouraging' ones, so that players move one square back when they land on the former, and forward when they land on the latter. The pieces for the players could be labelled with the names of Zerubbabel, Joshua etc. from Ezra 2:2. The players could move by using dice, though it is worth pointing out that what happened to Zerubbabel and his companions was not a matter of chance. God was overseeing the whole. The Temple was completed exactly 70 years after it was destroyed, as he had foretold.
- The class could write a letter from Zerubbabel to one of the exiles back in Babylon, telling him or other what had happened since their return.
- The class could find, or compose, a psalm that could be suitable for singing at the dedication of the Temple.