

THE RETURN HOME

Bible Basis: Ezra 1:1–7; 3:10–13; Haggai 1:2–11; Zechariah 8:2–22

Key Verse: They will be my people. I will be their faithful God, I will keep my promises to them.
—Zechariah 8:8 NIV

Bible Point: God’s people promise to follow his ways. God wants me to follow him.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 19: “The Return Home”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: wall

If you have a small class, all the children can participate. With a larger group, ask for several volunteers. Ask children to stand sideways against a wall and put one shoulder and one foot against the wall. Challenge them to try to lift the other foot off the floor. This is more difficult than it looks! After a few tries, explain that this action requires shifting your body’s balancing point, but the wall keeps you from doing that. Talk about:

- Tell me about something you’ve done that looked easy but turned out to be hard.
- Do you like to try new things, or do you like to stay with the old way? Explain.

Say, **In the Bible story today, we’ll see that God’s people reached a point where they had to shift their balancing point. They had to make some changes to do what God asked them to do.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 19*, scarf or length of fabric, noisemaker, pot lids or cymbals, music book, box of tissues

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 19. You can also have children find Ezra 1 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

The New Temple

Gather a scarf or length of fabric, noisemaker, pan lids or real cymbals, music book, and box of tissues. Ask five volunteers to stand with you as you tell the story. When you point to them, they should use the items you give them.

God’s people were excited! After long years of living in a foreign country far away, they were going home! Cyrus, the new king of Persia, sent a message all through the kingdom

telling God's people they could go back to Jerusalem, to their own city, and build a new temple for the Lord. The old temple had been destroyed when old king Nebuchadnezzar carried God's people off to the foreign country. Cyrus was a much nicer king. Now thousands of people got ready to travel. They packed up their stuff and rounded up their animals. *Read Ezra 1:6–7b.* Forty-two thousand people made the long trip back to Jerusalem, ready to rebuild their land.

The builders in the group got right down to business. They laid the foundation for the new temple right over the place where the old temple had been. And then it was time to party! The priests arrived with their special clothes. *Pause and dramatically drape a scarf or fabric around one child, fussing to get it just right. Have the child take a bow.*

They brought their trumpets with them. *Pause and give one child a noisemaker. Allow a moment for the child to make noise. Point at the priest to bow.*

The Levites came, too. They assisted the priests when the people worshiped. They brought their cymbals with them. *Pause and give pot lids or cymbals to one child and allow a moment to bang them together. Point at the trumpeter to blow the noisemaker. Point at the priest to bow.*

The priests and Levites took their places ready to praise the Lord. They did everything just the way the great King David had done it. They sang to the Lord. *Pause and give music to one child. Encourage the child to sing, "La, la, la." Point at the Levite to clang cymbals. Point at the trumpeter to blow the noisemaker. Point at the priest to bow.*

All the people thanked the Lord, they praised the Lord. Here's what they said. Repeat after me.

The Lord is good.

Echo: The Lord is good.

His faithful love to Israel

Echo: His faithful love to Israel

continues forever.

Echo: continues forever.

All the people gave a loud shout. Let's hear you give a loud shout of "Praise the Lord" on the count of three. Our musicians can play and sing with us. One, two, three! *Pause for a loud shout. The trumpeter should use the noisemaker, the Levite should clang the symbols, and the singer should sing, "La, la, la."*

The people were glad because the foundation of the Lord's temple had been laid. Now they would be able to worship the way God wanted them to. Now they would have a place to come and praise God together. Now they could let everyone around them know that they wanted to follow God. Going back to Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple was their way of saying they were ready to follow God now.

Read Ezra 3:12. Pause and hand the box of tissues to one child. Encourage the child to wail loudly.

Read Ezra 3:13. Let's hear another shout. You can shout, "Praise the Lord" or you can sob loudly. One, two, three! Pause to shout. The musicians can make their noises.

Not everyone in Jerusalem was excited about the new temple. The people who had been living in Jerusalem during all the years while God's people were gone didn't want a new temple. They didn't even want all these strange people there. They tried to cause all kinds of trouble to get rid of God's people and stop the building project, but King Cyrus had given the order for God's people to go back to Jerusalem, so the grumblers couldn't really do anything about it.

The people had to build houses, too. Some of them got distracted with building their own houses and forgot about working on the temple. So God sent messengers named Haggai and Zechariah to remind the people what they were supposed to be doing. Haggai and Zechariah reminded the people that God loved them and wanted them to worship him in the temple. Zechariah told the people that God said, "I will save my people. I will gather them from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem. They will be my people. I will be their faithful God. I will keep my promises to them."

Then the people got back to work on the temple. When it was finished, it was time to party again! Let's shout one more time. One, two, three. *Pause to shout.* Now the people had a place to worship God. God had kept his promise to bring them back to Jerusalem, and now they could keep their promises to follow his ways.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 19*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- How did the people show they were going to follow God?
- Name some ways you can follow God.

Say, **We all make mistakes, but God welcomes us to get right back on the path of following him.** Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: FESTIVAL OF NOISE

Stuff You Need: plastic straws, safety scissors, pot lids or cymbals

Say, **When the people gathered to celebrate at the new temple and to promise to follow God's ways, they brought their instruments—trumpets and cymbals. The Bible says they made a lot of noise! We're going to make straw horns and make some noise of our own.** Show children how to chew on one end of a straw until it's flat, about one inch in length. Then help children cut a "V" shape out of the flattened area to make it look like the point of a pencil. Blow through the flattened end. This mouthpiece must be as flat as possible to create the vibrations that make a sound. Let children make several of these "horns" and cut the straws to different lengths to create different

pitches. If you'd like, let some children toot along while others sing a favorite song, or they can try to play a song with their various pitches. Don't forget to bang cymbals during your festival of noise.

- **Why did the people want to make so much noise?**
- **How do you celebrate that you want to follow God?**

Say, **Following God is something to celebrate! Let the world know that's what you want to do!**

OPTION 2: TEMPLE BUILDERS

Stuff You Need: sheets, blankets, classroom items

Say, **In today's Bible story, we learned about how the people of Israel rebuilt the temple. Use the materials to build a temple of your own. It should be big enough for our entire class.** If you have a large class, divide children into small groups of four to eight and give each group supplies to build a temple. Allow children to work together to build a temple. When they are finished, crawl inside as a class and spend some time worshiping God by singing some of your class's favorite worship songs.

OPTION 3: WHERE I WORSHIP GOD

Stuff You Need: Where I Worship God Activity Sheet, crayons or colored pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Explain that the children should draw and color their church, adding as much detail as they can. Have them write a sentence, or words, that describe what makes their place of worship special.

OPTION 4: JOURNEY HOME

Stuff You Need: 9" x 12" pieces of felt, ribbon or yarn, Velcro strips, hole punch, markers, glitter glue, etc.

1. Fold up the bottom third of a piece of felt.
2. Keeping the folded part as the bottom, punch holes along both sides.
3. Use the ribbon or yarn to lace up the sides. Tie a knot at the top of each side to secure.
4. To close the bag, stick a small piece of Velcro on the inside of the top flap and another on the front of the pouch near the top.
5. Decorate using markers, glitter glue, etc.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together asking God to help you follow him this week. Encourage children to think of specific ways they can follow God this week. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 19*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.