

Completion, Dedication Of The Temple

Ezra 6:13-22

MEMORY VERSE

EZRA 6:16

“Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with Joy.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

A “Learning about Forgiveness” template for each child in your class and one brown paper bag.

Drawing paper and markers.

A bowl, a towel and pitcher with water to wash hands, a table cloth or sheet, a flashlight (to represent a candle), pot-pourri (to represent incense), napkins, assorted green vegetables (lettuce), grape juice, saltine crackers, and lunch meat cut into 4 pieces.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

Learning about Forgiveness

In the Old Testament animals were sacrificed to cover people’s sin. The Bible says that the “wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). In other words the punishment for our sin is death. God provided a way of forgiveness through His Son Jesus. But before Jesus died on the cross, God gave His people a picture of Jesus’ death through the animal sacrifices. When the innocent lamb was slain and the priest prayed, laying the sins of the people on the lamb, it was a beautiful picture of how Jesus would one day take upon Himself the punishment for our sins. We don’t have to do animal sacrifices anymore because when Jesus died on the cross, He took away all of our sins forever. When we come to Jesus we know that we are forgiven and our sins are removed from us for good. The Old Testament system wasn’t complete because they had to continually sacrifice animals.

For the children to gain better understanding of this concept have them cut out the animals from the enclosed sheet. They can color the animals if they would like. Have them think of something that they have done wrong and write it on the animal. You will have to assist the younger children. After this is done have a volunteer go around with a brown paper bag and collect all of the animals. Explain to the children that in Old Testament times they would make an offering of the animal for a covering of their sins. Explain to the children that you will place the bag out of sight never to be remembered again. That is how God's forgiveness works.

Today we don't sacrifice animals, but we do come to Jesus to receive forgiveness of sins. Is it not wonderful that we can turn to Jesus and find forgiveness of sin? He removes our sin forever.

Explain to the children that in our lesson today we will learn about how the Lord forgave His people and helped them to finish the building of the temple. They were able to make offerings again, worship in the temple, and celebrate Passover.

LESSON TIME!

What an amazing story we will be learning today. It shows that God will take care of His people no matter what. He will even move kings and rulers to do what He wants.

In the previous lesson, there were several people who were opposed to the Israelites rebuilding their temple. They wrote to King Darius to convince him to stop the work. They accused the Israelites of planning to rebuild Jerusalem and their temple and then rebelling against the king. The king listened to them and ordered the work to stop.

But God wasn't done yet! He moved King Darius to search the archives (kind of like a library) and he found a decree from King Cyrus, the king before him. The decree told about the time when

King Cyrus gave permission for the Jews to return to their land and to rebuild. We will see now how King Darius will change his decision and order the work to begin again.

EZRA 6:13-15

Then Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River, Shethar-Boznai, and their companions diligently did according to what King Darius had sent.

So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

After those who were against God's people received the decree of King Darius they became quite cooperative with God's people as they rebuilt the temple. They had no choice. They were in charge of the area, but King Darius was the ruler of their world. If you want to stay in charge of something, you do what your boss says.

After experiencing opposition from the hostile local government officials, after experiencing a period of interruption of building the temple to settle arguments, and after appealing to the highest authority in the land, God granted them favor. **When we ask for forgiveness, God always gives us another chance.** This shows the awesome power of God. And so the temple was completed in the month of Adar, which is the twelfth month in the Jewish religious calendar.

EZRA 6:16-18

Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.

And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions, over the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses.

The Bible says that the people, “celebrated with joy.” They had been able to move back to their own land, no longer captives in a foreign land. Their temple had been rebuilt. God, in His great grace had given them another opportunity to have a relationship with Him.

Although they had been gone from the land of Israel for over 70 years, they remained a separate people. They had been in captivity in Babylon all of that time because of their disobedience, but God heard their prayers asking for forgiveness and He helped them. So He brought them back to their land and restored them as a nation.

The Israelites never forgot that they were different from other nations, they were God’s people. They continued to raise their children who were born in captivity in the Law of Moses and the heritage of the Lord. They knew they were a chosen people, a special nation. They didn’t forget the sacrificial and cleansing laws, even though they hadn’t been able to practice them for over

70 years. They continued to study God's Word. The altar was now rebuilt and the people were ready to rededicate the house of God and each tribe of Israel.

God's House

For this activity you will need a sheet of paper and markers. Have the children draw a church building. It might be a traditional looking building or another kind of building as many churches now meet in various places.

In our lesson today we see that the people were filled with joy at the completion of the temple, God's house. Of course we are the temple of the Holy Spirit today. But we do still gather in buildings as His people. As a comparison, have the children think of ways that they can serve the Lord by taking care of the building that He has given us. Have the children list ways that they can help take care the church building God has allowed them to meet in.

Remember that the people had been gone from their special land for over 70 years – many of the people who returned to Israel were born in Babylon. They had never seen the land or the “Beautiful City,” as Jerusalem was called in the days of King David. But how much they had heard about it! Do your grandparents ever tell you stories about the olden days? Where they used to live and what life was like? That's what this generation of Jewish children heard about all the time. They knew they were “strangers in a strange land.” What excitement there must have been when they heard they were being released to go back to their homeland, the place where they really belonged!

This is a good reminder for us living in these modern days. You now belong to the Lord of the Bible if you are a Christian. God's Word tells us that we are "strangers in a strange land" (1 Peter 2:11). He is going to call us to come "home" (heaven) someday. That is something to look forward to, isn't it? And meanwhile, here in this "strange land," when we make mistakes, we know that **when we ask for forgiveness, God always gives us another chance.**

EZRA 6:19-22

And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.

For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them were ritually clean. And they slaughtered the Passover lambs for all the descendants of the captivity, for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.

Then the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the LORD God of Israel.

And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the LORD made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

Here the people are in the month of Adar, the twelfth month of their calendar. The next month is Nisan, the month of their most important holiday, Passover. This is the part of the year when the Jews were called by God to celebrate His deliverance from Egypt. Do you remember the reason for that holiday? It was a reminder of God's salvation for the people from slavery in Egypt. They had to sacrifice an innocent lamb and spread the blood on their doorposts

to keep the Angel of Death away. What a picture for us of the innocent blood that was shed to save us! They were being saved from bondage and slavery in Egypt. We are being saved from the bondage and slavery of our sins which leads to death !

So after 70 years of having no altar to sacrifice a lamb on, no celebration of their most precious holiday, Passover, they now had the opportunity to do all of these things again. The Bible says over and over how they celebrated with joy. Could you imagine having a party at church for seven days?!!

Now, we can celebrate God's salvation in our lives every day. This is all a picture of what the Lord has provided for us in salvation. God sent His Son, Jesus, to be the sacrifice for our sins. We can now have eternal life, become citizens of heaven, and worship Him.

Just like His people during this time, God wants us to follow Him. He loved us and saved us. He saves us. He picks us up after we stumble. Even as we are disciplined, it is good to know--as God's Word says--**when we ask for forgiveness, God always gives us another chance.**

Passover Meal

In our lesson today the people of Israel celebrated Passover for the first time in 70 years. They were very excited to be able to. As a reminder of Passover and what it represents serve a Passover Meal in your class.

You will need a bowl, a towel and pitcher with water to wash hands, a table cloth or sheet, a flashlight (to represent a candle), pot-pourri (to represent incense), napkins, assorted green vegetables (lettuce), grape juice, saltine crackers, and lunch meat cut into 4 pieces.

Explain to the children what the elements represent and how it is a picture of the Lord's deliverance from Egypt. You may also want to compare it to the Lord's Supper in the New Testament and how that Jesus is the Passover Lamb, His blood being shed for our sins. The following is how the elements are represented.

1. Eating the greens – Rebirth and the renewal of spring.
2. Salt water – Reminds God's people of the tears that were shed in bondage and the Lord's deliverance through the Red Sea (Before coming to Jesus we are in bondage to our sin).
3. Grape juice – Reminds us of the blood of the Lamb that had to be applied over the doorposts (blood of Jesus).
4. Crackers – Unleavened Bread (Jesus is the bread of life, His body was broken for us on the cross).
5. Lunch Meat – Represents shankbone of lamb, which was sacrificed for the sin of the people (Jesus is the Lamb of God, come to take away the sins of the world).

For more information you may wish to consult a good Bible dictionary.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to always ask for forgiveness whenever they sin and to thank the Lord that He always will forgive and restore us to fellowship with Him. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity.

