

=BOOKS OF THE BIBLE=

Lesson 15

Ezra

Objects to have:

A sign reading: EZRA

Rebuilding the Temple

A picture of a burning building

A picture of a building that is under construction

A picture of our church building

An “order” from King Cyrus to rebuild the temple

Your Bible.

Introducing the lesson:

(Review with the children the names of the books of the Bible studied thus far. Show the children the location of Ezra; show them the sign.) The new book name for today is EZRA.

Ezra was the name of a man. Ezra lived at a sad time. The Israelites were very sad. They were sad like our church people were when our church burned.

How sad Pacific Baptist Church was many years ago—before you were born! (It was June 5, 1964.) Very early in the morning, before it was time for people to get up out of bed, some telephones were ringing. When people answered, “Hello,” the person who was calling said, “Did you know that our old church building is burning? It has burned almost to the ground. The building that was on the corner has burned, too. It looks like the new church building is going to burn. It looks as if the building where the offices and some of the Sunday school departments are is in danger, too.”

How terrible the news was! Even though it was still dark outside and not time to get up, some members of Pacific Baptist Church got out of bed and got dressed. They got into their cars and went to the church. They could not get very close to the church building because of the terrible flames, so they had to stand across the street. As the people looked at the fire, they cried. How terrible to see their church building burning! Many people had been saved and baptized in that church building. Many people had been married in that building. On Sunday after Sunday and Wednesday after Wednesday they had heard the Bible preached there. How sad people were to see it burning!

Then some happy days came. Brother Hyles, the pastor, led the church to decide to build. (Hold up the picture of a building under construction.) The building where the chapel and the fellowship hall and the nurseries and the beginner departments and other Sunday school rooms are was built on the very spot where the old building was. Then the people were happier with the new building than they had been with the old building. There was more space in the new building for more people to come to Sunday school.

Something like that happened in the Old Testament times of the Bible. We read about it in the book of Ezra, our Bible book for today.

Telling the story:

How sad God’s people were! They had heard some terrible news! Their telephones had not rung, because they did not have telephones in those days, but messengers ran from place to place, telling, “You should see the

temple in Jerusalem. It would make you cry to see it. The walls are completely broken down. The altar at which our people have stood and have knelt is broken up, also. The beautiful furniture that was in the temple is gone.”

The Israelites were sad indeed to hear this news! They were not in their own country when they heard the news. They had been taken away from their country to the country of Babylon. It was the Babylonian army that had broken up the temple and had stolen the furniture and everything else that was in the temple.

Then God spoke to the heart of the king of Babylon. The king was named Cyrus. That king was trusting in God; he had heard about God from the Israelites. King Cyrus called a meeting. At the meeting he said, “Who of you Israelites are going to go back to Jerusalem to build up the temple? I want you to go back. You have my permission to go. The temple is all broken up and needs to be rebuilt. Who will go? I will give back some furniture that goes into the temple. I will help you get stones and wood and other things you need, also.”

There were many men who decided that they would go back to Jerusalem to build the temple. Ezra was not one of them, however; he stayed in Babylon. Then King Cyrus spoke again, “There are many of you who are not going to go back to Jerusalem to build the temple. You be sure to give money so that stones and wood and all that is needed in the rebuilding of the temple can be bought.”

How busy the people became! They were busy getting together all the animals that would be needed on the long trip back to Jerusalem. The animals would have to be loaded with the building material; they were the trucks of that day. Some animals would carry the furniture which had been taken from the temple. Some would have to carry wood; some would have to carry bags of gold and silver. There were many camels and horses and donkeys—thousands of them—which were loaded up and harnessed for the long trip back to Jerusalem. Many of the animals were saddled so that men might ride them; some packs were tied to the animals that were being ridden.

It was like a long parade across the many miles from Babylon to Jerusalem. They finally got to Jerusalem. Men got busy rebuilding the temple. First they built the altar. That was where the people would kill certain kinds of animals as they confessed their sins and asked God to forgive them. How happy everyone was when the altar was finished! Then it was time to clear away all the broken stones that had once been walls and the dirt and the weeds which had grown where the temple had been.

It was time to dig the foundation for the temple. Men dug a hole into the earth—a hole big enough to build the foundation. How hard they worked! For days and weeks, I am sure, men were busy getting the foundation built. While they were building, there were some people who came to watch. As each foot of the foundation was finished, they were so happy!

One day they stood back and said, “The foundation of the temple is finished! Now we can build the walls on the foundation!” The people shouted with a great shout. They said, “Praise the Lord!” They bowed their heads. “Thank you, Lord,” they said. Some even cried, because they were so happy that the foundation of the temple was laid. They made so much noise with their singing and their shouting that the people who lived miles away from Jerusalem heard it.

Some of those people who lived miles away were still enemies of the Israelites. When those enemies saw that the altar and the foundation of the temple were built, they became angry. They said, “How dare these people rebuild this temple! How dare they come back to Jerusalem and do this thing!” You can tell that they did not love God! These enemies said, “We must stop the Israelites from finishing the temple.”

The enemies of the Israelites sent a letter back to Babylon. They sent the letter to the king there. But, the king was not King Cyrus any more; there was a new king. The new king got the letter. He opened it, and he read, “You must stop the Israelites from rebuilding their temple.”

Do you know what the new king did? He sent soldiers from Babylon to Jerusalem, and he made the Israelites stop building! The soldiers grabbed the arms of the workers. They forced the workers to leave the place. The soldiers made them stop working on the temple.

The Israelites did not forget, however, that they had been told by King Cyrus that they could build. God was not going to let His people give up. They kept on planning. They planned how the inside of the temple should look. Little by little they went back to working on the temple. The walls were being built—the stones were being laid one on top of the other. Wherever wood was needed, the carpenters were busy sawing and hammering.

By this time there was another new king in Babylon. His men went to Jerusalem. They saw the work of the temple going on. They wrote a letter to this new king. “Oh, King, we see that the Israelites are still building the temple. We asked them who gave them permission to do this. We wrote down the names of the people who are building. Here are their names. We say that they are guilty of doing wrong, of not having permission to do this work. They say, though, that they had permission from King Cyrus to do this.”

The new king listened to his men. He said, “Maybe permission was given to the Israelites to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Secretaries, help me look for the copy of the order that King Cyrus might have written.”

The new king and his helpers began to look through the files in the king’s offices. They were looking for a copy of the permission that was given to the Israelites to rebuild the temple. Finally someone said, “Here it is! Read this.” (Hold up the “order to rebuild.”)

The new king read the order. After he read it, he said, “Let the Israelites continue to build. Let them alone. They are doing a good work. In fact, I want you to give the Israelites some animals and all that they would need to make sacrifices to God. I am giving a commandment that whoever would try to stop the Israelites from finishing their temple would have his own house torn down and that he be killed. Nobody should stop the Israelites from building their temple.”

The Israelites worked harder and harder. Finally the job was finished. The temple at Jerusalem was built!

Then it was that the preacher—Ezra—was told by God to go to Jerusalem. Everybody needs a preacher. The Israelites needed a preacher. Some of them, even though they said that they loved God, were sinning and not even being sorry for their sins.

Ezra traveled from Babylon to Jerusalem. Ezra saw how the people were living. Even though they wanted the new temple, even though they did what they could to help in the rebuilding of the temple, some of them were sinning against God. One of the bad things they were doing: Some of the men of the Israelites married ladies who did not trust God. Ezra, the preacher, found that out. He preached and he scolded. He said, “We are supposed to obey God in everything.” Ezra preached every part of the Bible that they had then. He told them how much God loved them and how sorry He was that they had sinned so badly.

As the Israelites heard Ezra preach, they were sorry for their sins. They were so sorry that they wept. They asked God to forgive them. They started trusting God again.

What a happy time they all had in Jerusalem after the temple was rebuilt!

I have told you some of the story of the book of Ezra. Let’s learn some words from the book of Ezra: Ezra 10:10, 11, “And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed...Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure....”