



LONG STORY SHORT

A Year through the Bible

Reflection Guide

The Return Home: Ezra; Haggai; Zechariah Exploring the Story, Chapter 19

After 70 years in exile in Babylon, King Cyrus allows the Jews to return to Jerusalem. As they arrive and begin to rebuild their lives, their first task is to begin to rebuild the temple. This week, we follow the Jews' journey to return to Jerusalem and rebuild God's home among them.

MONDAY

Read: Ezra 1–2

Reflect: As the Jews begin to rebuild their lives in the Promised Land, one of their first priorities is rebuilding the temple. The people give their own money generously and sacrificially to the temple's reconstruction. About what, if anything, are you passionate? Why? When, if ever, have you been moved to give generously and sacrificially towards a cause?

Respond: Make a list of your priorities and passions, ranking them by how important they are to you. How do you demonstrate your passion and commitment to the things on your list?

TUESDAY

Read: Zechariah 1–2

Reflect: The return of the Jews to Jerusalem is the first of two homecomings. God will also return and live among the people again. Jerusalem will once again be prosperous and populous. Zechariah makes it clear that the renewal of Jerusalem will be God's handiwork. Do you find it reassuring or frustrating to know that God is completely in control, even when things don't go your way? Why or why not? What, if anything, helps you to trust in God's goodness in difficult circumstances?

Respond: In prayer, ask God to show you what renewal might look like in your community. How might God be calling you to participate in the work of renewal?

WEDNESDAY

Read: Ezra 3–4

Reflect: The people reestablish the festivals, rebuild the altar, and lay the foundation for the new temple. Judah's enemies want the project halted, and have the Persian king issue an edict prohibiting the reconstruction of Jerusalem and the temple. What is your typical response when something prevents you from doing something that you believe God has called you to do?

Respond: Consider your faith journey. When, if ever, has it

felt as though you were kept from answering God's call?

THURSDAY

Read: Haggai 1–2

Reflect: Haggai was a prophet active during the time of the temple's reconstruction. He encourages the people to finish what they started and to make rebuilding the temple—God's house—a higher priority than building their own homes. Are you prone to abandoning projects when you encounter adversity? Why or why not? What resources does your Christian faith give you to stay focused and dedicated?

Respond: In prayer, ask God to help you stay focused and dedicated in your faith life.

FRIDAY

Read: Ezra 5–6

Reflect: King Darius directs the governor to provide materials and funds to assist the Jews in the reconstruction of the temple. Finally, the temple is complete, and the Passover is celebrated for the first time after the exile. Place yourself in this story. How do you think the Jews felt once the temple was completed and the Passover was celebrated? Why? How, if at all, do you typically express joy and thanks when your prayers are answered?

Respond: In prayer, ask God to help you live out your faith with confidence and boldness.

SATURDAY

Read: Zechariah 7

Reflect: People come to the temple to ask about some fine details of observing a fast. God's answer is that ritual observance and fasting are meaningless if they don't lead to justice, mercy, love, and grace. Whenever we encounter God, we leave as changed people. Read 7:9–10. Concretely, what would a life that exemplified justice, mercy, love, and grace look like? What would a community marked by those qualities look like? As you look at your own life, how does your Christian faith enable you to live out those qualities?

Respond: In prayer, ask God to help you live a life that exemplifies the kind of life Zechariah describes in 7:9–10.

SUNDAY

Read: Zechariah 8

Reflect: Zechariah shares a vision for what life will be like when God returns to Jerusalem and lives among the people. It will become a place of peace and prosperity, where people will be able to live in God's presence. As you read this description, what is your reaction? For what kind of life do you long most deeply?

Respond: In worship this morning, ask God to increase your desire to live life in God's presence.

* * * * *