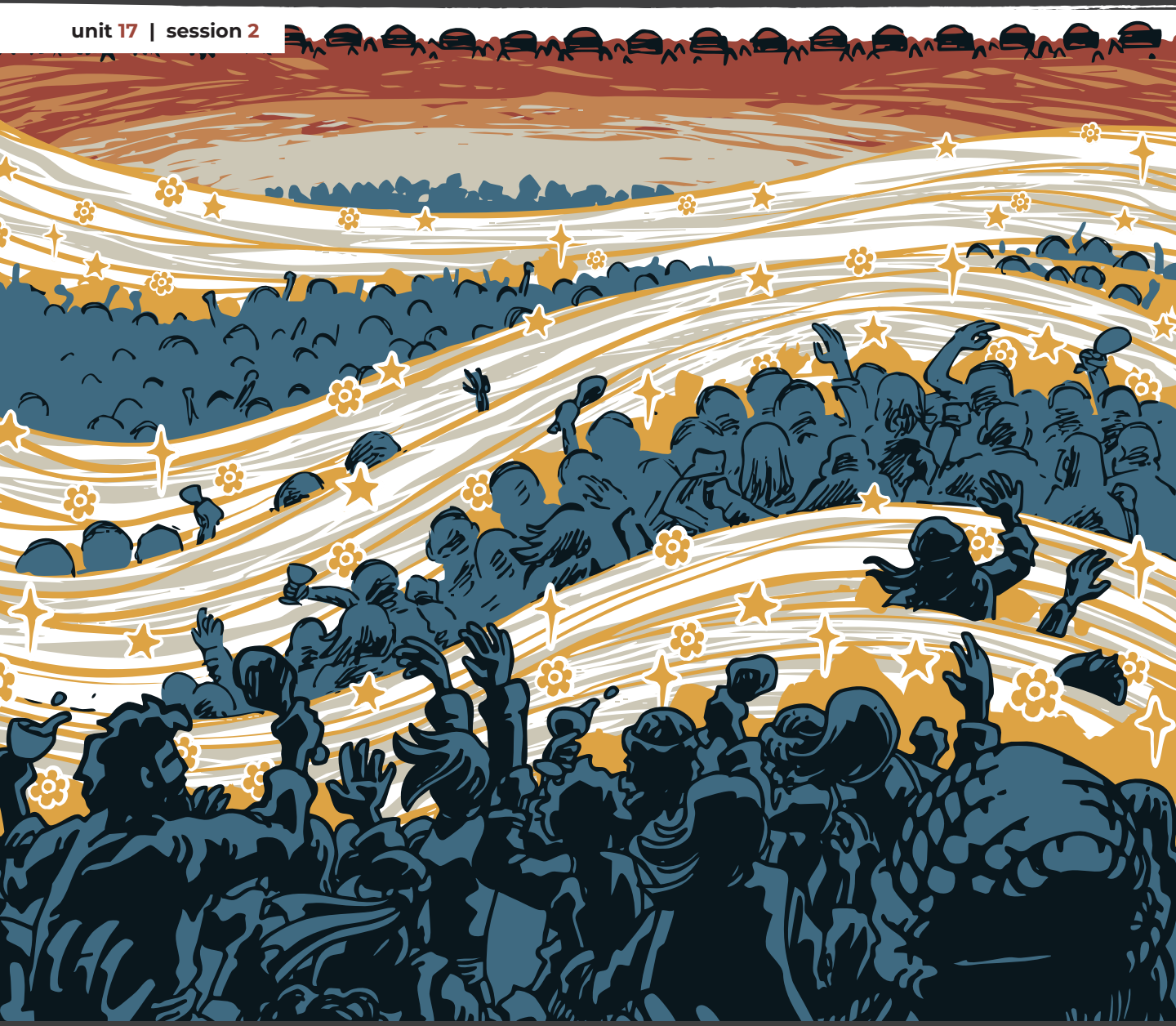
REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

unit 17 | session 2



CHRIST CONNECTION

God's people rebuilt the temple so they would have a place to worship God. Years later, God sent His Son, Jesus, to be with His people. Jesus provided something better than the temple; He gave us Himself.

REBUILDING FROM THE RUINS

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Ezra 4–6; Haggai 1–2

GOD WORKS THROUGH US FOR HIS NAME

EZRA 6:6-12

6 Therefore, you must stay away from that place, Tattenai governor of the region west of the
Euphrates River, Shethar-bozenai, and your colleagues, the officials in the region. 7 Leave the
construction of the house of God alone. Let the governor and elders of the Jews rebuild this
house of God on its original site. 8 I hereby issue a decree concerning what you are to do, so
that the elders of the Jews can rebuild the house of God: The cost is to be paid in full to these
men out of the royal revenues from the taxes of the region west of the Euphrates River, so
that the work will not stop. 9 Whatever is needed—young bulls, rams, and lambs for burnt
offerings to the God of the heavens, or wheat, salt, wine, and oil, as requested by the priests in
Jerusalem—let it be given to them every day without fail, 10 so that they can offer sacrifices of
pleasing aroma to the God of the heavens and pray for the life of the king and his sons. 11 I also
issue a decree concerning any man who interferes with this directive: Let a beam be torn from
his house and raised up; he will be impaled on it, and his house will be made into a garbage
dump because of this offense. 12 May the God who caused his name to dwell there overthrow
any king or people who dares to harm or interfere with this house of God in Jerusalem. I,
Darius, have issued the decree. Let it be carried out diligently.

WORSHIP REQUIRES PREPARATION

EZRA 6:16-22

16 Then the Israelites, including the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the exiles, celebrated
the dedication of the house of God with joy. 17 For the dedication of God's house they offered
one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, and four hundred lambs, as well as twelve male goats
as a sin offering for all Israel—one for each Israelite tribe. 18 They also appointed the priests
by their divisions and the Levites by their groups to the service of God in Jerusalem, according
to what is written in the book of Moses. 19 The exiles observed the Passover on the fourteenth
day of the first month. 20 All of the priests and Levites were ceremonially clean, because they
had purified themselves. They killed the Passover lamb for themselves, their priestly brothers,
and all the exiles. 21 The Israelites who had returned from exile ate it, together with all who
had separated themselves from the uncleanness of the Gentiles of the land in order to worship
the LORD, the God of Israel. 22 They observed the Festival of Unleavened Bread for seven days
with joy, because the LORD had made them joyful, having changed the Assyrian king's attitude
toward them, so that he supported them in the work on the house of the God of Israel.

MAIN POINT.

God works for our good and for His glory.

THEOLOGY *CONNECTION*

GOD IS FAITHFUL

God's faithfulness means He keeps His word and always fulfills His promises (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:13; 1 Pet. 4:19). God's faithfulness is demonstrated in His fulfillment of the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The apostle Paul linked the attribute of "faithful" to God's coming through on His word in 1 Thessalonians 5:24. We reflect God by keeping the promises we make to Him and to others.

DISCUSSION

GOD WORKS THROUGH US FOR HIS NAME

EZRA 6:6-12

- **Where do you see God's work in King Darius's response?**
- **If you came back to rebuild, what kind of help would you ask for? How did a Persian king know what the Jews needed to worship God?**
- **Why did God bring His people home? How is that return connected to Jesus (v. 12)**

WORSHIP REQUIRES PREPARATION

EZRA 6:16-22

- **What did the Israelites celebrate (v. 19)? Why did the way they celebrated matter?**
- **How do you think the people felt taking part in Passover for the first time?**
- **How can we prepare to worship God? What difference could this make for us?**

WHY DID THE PEOPLE'S OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S COMMANDS MATTER GREATLY IN THIS PASSAGE? WHY DOES OURS MATTER TOO?

CULTURAL *CONNECTION*

Do you ever feel like you're in a rebuilding phase? Maybe parts of your life feel like ruins and rubble—a relationship with a parent or a friend, your reputation, your grades. What once stood strong fell apart. Maybe your relationship with God needs rebuilding. Your relationship was once like a strong building, but over time, the building began to sway; then, it cracked and fell. Maybe you're at the beginning of your walk with God, trying to figure out how to start building. Whether you're a new believer or not, you'll likely experience a time when you need to rebuild. The history of God's people is full of rebuilding periods. In those periods, we see that successfully rebuilding began with repentance and worship. Every time. In the end, the physical structures they rebuilt, like the temple or the city, mattered greatly, but what mattered more was the people returning to the Lord in their hearts. Rebuilding begins internally. If you begin anywhere else—with works, with checklists, with outward appearances—then you'll likely crumble again. Build on the foundation of repentance and worship; allow internal work to produce change.

DAY ONE

ISAIAH 65:17-25

Think about something you spent a long time waiting for, and think about the joy and relief you felt when what you had waited for finally came. The people of Israel had waited for seventy years in exile and another fifty years after for the temple to be rebuilt so they could worship God rightly. In Ezra 6, we saw that they did some serious rejoicing after it was finished!

However, the Israelites' rejoicing was still incomplete. Before the exile even began, the Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah and gave a glimpse of the perfect kingdom to come in the future. The Israelites rejoiced in the rebuilding of the temple because they could worship God properly again, but better things were still to come. About 500 years after this rebuilding, Jesus came to the earth to live, to die, and to be resurrected so that those who believe in Him can be forgiven of sin and spend eternity in the presence of God. As believers, we get to rejoice in this reality *now*—the reality that we are able to be in right relationship with God and have the Holy Spirit in us because of Jesus's sacrifice! But, more is still to come! The passage in Isaiah foreshadows a time in the future when Jesus will return and His kingdom will be established fully in the new heavens and new earth. All sin, shame, and pain will be gone, and believers will spend all eternity with God. Think about how much greater our rejoicing will be on that day! For today, we celebrate the saving work of Jesus, we share the gospel, and we eagerly wait for the day to come when both the kingdom and our joy will be complete!

- **HOW COULD DAILY REMINDING YOURSELF OF THE PERFECT KINGDOM TO COME HELP YOU HAVE HOPE WHEN STRUGGLING WITH DISAPPOINTMENT OR PAIN?**
- **HOW DOES KNOWING THAT GOD FULFILLED HIS PROMISES TO THE ISRAELITES HELP YOU TO TRUST IN THE PROMISE OF ETERNITY WITH HIM?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR THE CHANCE TO REJOICE IN JESUS'S SACRIFICE. HELP ME TO SHARE MY HOPE OF SPENDING ETERNITY WITH YOU IN THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH WITH OTHERS.

DAY TWO

EZRA 7:8-10; 9:1-3

The people of Israel were finally home in their land. They had rebuilt the temple and were able to worship properly again. Unfortunately, what we see in the story is that the people never truly stopped committing the sins that had sent them into exile. Even after experiencing the consequences of their sin, and the grace of the Lord to allow them to return, their hearts were prone to sin, and they disobeyed God. Ezra, one of the priests of Israel, had committed his life to teaching the people the law and calling them to obey God. Ezra was devastated when he heard about Israel's sin because of how far they had strayed from God's will.

Do you ever feel like you keep making the same mistake again and again? Israel returned to sin over and over again, and so has every person who has ever lived other than Jesus. Jesus sacrificed Himself because of humanity's continued pattern of sin, but those who believe in Him are cleansed of sin and guilt once and for all. As believers who have a relationship with Christ, we still continue to sin throughout our lives. We won't be made sinless until we are in eternity, but how we react to our sin matters. Consider how you react when the Holy Spirit reveals patterns of sin in your life. The people of Israel chose to ignore the severity of their sin and continued to live in it, no matter the consequences. But Ezra, who felt real sorrow and grief over the sin around him and inside his heart, desired change. When God reveals your sin, what do you do to stop the cycle instead of numbing out or ignoring it? For example, what do you do to stop gossiping, using profanity, or dishonoring God on your phone? May we seek to repent of our sin and follow Ezra's example as we understand the weight of our sin.

- **WHAT DOES ISRAEL'S REPEATED SIN TELL US ABOUT HUMAN NATURE AND OUR NEED FOR JESUS?**
- **HOW DO YOU NORMALLY RESPOND TO SIN? DO YOU IGNORE IT OR TRY TO JUSTIFY IT? HOW CAN YOU RESPOND WITH SORROW AND SEEK REPENTANCE?**

PRAY

LORD, HELP ME TO RECOGNIZE MY SIN AND TO GRIEVE OVER IT. HELP ME TO REPENT OF SIN AND TO LOVE YOUR WORD SO THAT I CAN STRIVE TO BE MORE LIKE CHRIST.

DAY THREE

EZRA 9:4-15; 10:1-4

The Israelites had been living in sin, and when the priest Ezra found out, he was deeply upset and grieved by their sin. His immediate response was to take time to fast and pray to the Lord, confessing the sins of his people. Ezra did not make excuses for the people or even ask the Lord to spare them from His anger, but he simply confessed the depth of their sin to the Lord. Part of why Ezra was so upset was because Israel had repeated this sin since they first came to the promised land under Joshua's leadership. Israel's story was one of disobedience to God, and Ezra struggled to see the people unchanged.

Thinking that the Israelites are foolish is easy for us. We think we would never live in or repeat sin the way they did. Unfortunately, we see that sin has been a fundamental part of humanity since the fall in Genesis 3, when sin entered the world through Adam and Eve. We must follow the example set by Ezra and the people as they worked to respond to this sin! They immediately confessed their disobedience and separated themselves from the people they were sinning with. Since we are prone to sinning and disobeying God, we should address our sin as soon as we recognize it and actively work to prevent ourselves from committing that sin again. We may need to remove temptation from our lives or even walk away from relationships that drag us down. We can't allow sin to continue to grow in our lives, and we can't justify or excuse our sin. The Lord alone sanctifies us, or makes us clean, but we must respond by taking steps to remove sin from our lives. When you find yourself stuck and struggling in sin, cry out to God and ask Him to help you to be more like His Son.

- **WHY IS RESPONDING TO SIN IMMEDIATELY BETTER THAN WAITING OR ATTEMPTING TO IGNORE IT?**
- **WHY IS SEPARATING YOURSELF FROM SIN NECESSARY, LIKE THE ISRAELITES SEPARATING THEMSELVES? WHAT OR WHO DO YOU NEED TO SEPARATE YOURSELF FROM TO STOP A CYCLE OF SIN?**

PRAY

LORD, HELP ME TO TURN TO YOU WHEN I AM STUCK IN SIN INSTEAD OF IGNORING MY DISOBEDIENCE. THANK YOU FOR THE GRACE YOU HAVE SHOWN ME OVER AND OVER, EVEN WHEN I AM STUCK IN CYCLES OF SIN.

DAY FOUR

NEHEMIAH 8:13-18

The book of Nehemiah, which comes right after the book of Ezra, continues the story of Jerusalem's restoration and God's work to bring the people of Israel back to obedience through people like Ezra, Nehemiah, and Haggai. After the walls of the city were rebuilt, Ezra began to teach the Word of God to the people to help them know *how* to follow the Lord. While he was teaching, the people learned that they were supposed to celebrate the Feast of Booths during that time of year. For the people of Israel, feasts and festivals helped them remember ways that God had provided for their ancestors and been faithful to them throughout history. The people began to celebrate the feast and remembered how God provided for Israel while they wandered in the wilderness after God freed them from Egyptian slavery.

We are prone to forgetting, aren't we? We forget small things—like where we put our keys or why we walked into a room—but we also have a tendency to forget the important things. The people of Israel might not have forgotten that the Exodus happened, but they had not taken the time to reflect on the faithfulness of God in caring for His people during that time. In the same way, we need to remember all the ways God has been faithful to us. You probably aren't going to stay in a tent for a week like the Israelites did during the Feast of Booths, but you can keep a journal of the ways the Lord has answered prayers. You can take time every day to reflect on how the Lord provided for you in big and small ways. Remembering how God has been faithful encourages us to be more faithful to Him.

- **WHAT PROBLEMS CAN COME FROM FORGETTING THE WAYS GOD HAS BEEN FAITHFUL TO US? WHY DO WE SO EASILY FORGET GOD'S FAITHFULNESS?**
- **HOW CAN YOU PRACTICE REFLECTING DAILY ON THE LORD'S FAITHFULNESS IN YOUR LIFE?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONSTANT FAITHFULNESS IN MY LIFE. HELP ME TO REMEMBER YOUR GOODNESS AND TURN TO YOU EVEN IN DIFFICULT TIMES. MAY MY LIFE REFLECT YOUR LOVE MORE AND MORE EVERY DAY.

DAY FIVE

NEHEMIAH 9:32-38

Most of us have probably experienced a time when we *knew* we deserved our punishment for something we did wrong. Maybe you even got a lesser punishment than what you were expecting or should have received. In this passage in Nehemiah, the people of Israel had just spent time recounting their history—all the moments God was faithful and all the moments they were sinful. Not to spoil the story, but God was (and is) always faithful, and the people of Israel always ended up sinning (just like us). They acknowledged that they deserved the consequence they received—being exiled to another land—and they actually admitted that the Lord was just, or right, for punishing them. The people reminded themselves of the Lord's righteousness and goodness even though life was difficult for them in Israel still.

Admitting that we're wrong isn't easy for most of us; even more difficult is admitting that we deserve to face big consequences. However, we should take a moment to learn from Israel here. They acknowledged their sin and the Lord's justice in punishing them, but they also acknowledged God's righteousness and steadfast love. In the face of our own sin, we should confess our wrongdoing and proclaim the Lord's goodness even when consequences loom. Reminding ourselves that God loves us despite our sin should drive us to worship and obedience. The people of Israel took time to renew their covenant with God, recommitting themselves to follow His Word. When we sin, we should confess it, praise the Lord for His faithfulness and kindness to forgive us, and seek to repent and obey. Israel knew that God's discipline was a sign of His great love for them, and the same is true in our lives today.

- **HOW DOES GOD DISCIPLINING HIS CHILDREN REFLECT HIS LOVE FOR THEM? WHY DO WE OFTEN MISTAKE HIS DISCIPLINE AS GOD BEING HARSH OR UNKIND TO US?**
- **IS ADMITTING WHEN YOU'VE BEEN WRONG DIFFICULT FOR YOU? HOW COULD THIS IMPACT YOUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR JUSTICE AND YOUR STEADFAST LOVE FOR ME EVEN WHEN I SIN AGAINST YOU. HELP ME TO RESPOND TO YOUR FORGIVENESS WITH WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE.