

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
OCTOBER052024

temple building and you

Scripture Story: Haggai; Ezra 4–6.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 46.
Key Text: Ezra 5:11.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Recounting the rebuilding of the Temple is a tried- and-true technique used for years by pastors and elders to promote church-building projects. It also provides opportunity to demonstrate God's workings through His people as they face great difficulty or personal peril. He even used one of the great rulers of the ancient world, Persian king Darius I (522-486 B.C.—known for his administrative acumen and massive building projects), to further His will. This week's lesson uses not only the Bible as a historical source, but also includes references to ancient archival records quoted in the Bible.

During the reign of Cyrus, a predecessor to Darius, the enemies of Judah and Benjamin (i.e., the Samaritans) heard about the Temple-rebuilding effort in Jerusalem and offered to help. Their offer was declined because the Jewish people learned during their Babylonian exile to resist the temptation to join idolaters in any undertaking. This rebuff led to Samaritan-initiated efforts to thwart the rebuilding endeavor, ultimately leading to its cessation until Darius eventually ordered it otherwise. Darius even provided funds from the royal treasury to pay the full cost of the project, all the animals needed for burnt offerings, and the items needed by the priests to conduct their ceremonial rituals.

The rebuilding of the Temple can be used to illustrate a sense of church identity (e.g., the Jewish people decided to do the work unaided by other groups); church unity (e.g., the people worked with one accord to accomplish the goal of rebuilding the Temple); and stewardship of time and resources.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand how God works through His people and others to accomplish His purposes. *(Know)*
- Feel connected to God's people past, present, and future by how they respond to His leading today. *(Feel)*
- Commit themselves to God's service and leading as they see how God led His people to rebuild the Temple. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

Stewardship, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 21: "We are God's stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use. We acknowledge God's ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow human beings, and by returning tithe and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church." (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15; 1 Chronicles 29:14; Haggai 1:3-11; Malachi 3:8-12; Matthew 23:23; Romans 15:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 9:9-14; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 9:7.)

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. Discuss their responses.*

Invite the students to share their ideas regarding the design of a Seventh-day Adventist church sanctuary (i.e., a modern-day temple). While not a setting where ceremonial rituals take place (unlike the Temple), today's churches remain places in which God's people meet to worship, praise, and fellowship. What, if anything, do the architecture and accoutrements of our churches say about our identity as a denomination? What about our church signs and official logo?

We are one church, united in the body of Christ, striving to represent God's character to a fallen world. Our church identity and unity ultimately come from our relationship with God and our desire to follow His leading, not our worship style or sanctuary architecture.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

In many areas of the United States signs can be seen along roads acknowledging groups that have volunteered to maintain that section of highway by picking up trash, mowing, and generally making the roadside look nice. Group names seen on such signs include families (good way to bond!), realty agents (good advertising!), or other businesses.

One day I was momentarily stumped upon seeing a sign that gave credit to BSA Troop 312 for keeping the roadside looking sharp. Being more familiar with Pathfinders than the Boy Scouts of America, I hadn't quickly realized what the abbreviation meant. Shortly thereafter I saw a sign crediting the local SDA church using the initials SDA rather than the full name of the denomination. I wondered how many passersby would recognize that abbreviation.

In the public high school that I attended, one of the staff members in the library where I volunteered enthusiastically noted she was familiar with my church. She exclaimed, "You're one of those Seven-days Adventurers!" We laughed and discussed the actual name of the church and what it meant, but I've never forgotten the term she used. We *are* Seven-days Adventurers, daily living our lives with joy and purpose as we share God's love with those around us.

Our identity as a denomination is rooted in our belief that we are a remnant church, part of the lineage of God's special people throughout human history. The name proclaims two of the major tenets we hold dear. Ask your students if they feel part of this Advent movement, begun in the mid-nineteenth century, and God's people throughout history.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

God uses His people, past and present, to accomplish His purposes. As Seventh-day Adventists we are specially positioned to be His servants in earth's last days just as the Jewish people were specially positioned to rebuild the Temple in Old Testament times. That position comes with responsibility to reflect His character to others, to serve Him with our full and best effort, and to be faithful stewards.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- What are the names of the two people who stepped up to take the lead in rebuilding the Temple? Who helped them? Are the charter member names known in your local church? Who were the key people involved with getting it started?
- What impact did reading the authoritative historical record have on those who wished the Temple building to stop? What are some examples of authoritative historical records maintained today in government and/or other institutional archives? Why is it important that such records be kept and made available?
- While more than 18 million people is a large number, that total church membership worldwide provides little comfort or feeling of belonging if you're in an area where there are not many Seventh-day Adventists. Have you experienced dis-

couragement in such circumstances? Discuss ways to engender a fuller sense of belonging to a worldwide body of believers or to God's people in times past.

- Can you think of times in history when God used an earthly leader to further His goal?
- Discuss with your students why there is no longer need for a fully functioning Temple complete with ceremonial rituals.
- What role does stewardship play in furthering God's goals today? Ask a pastor or elder to share examples with your students of how proper stewardship has resulted in something tangible at your church.
- American civil rights leader John Lewis, now a U.S. congressman from the state of Georgia, has said America needs young people today who are willing to "get in the way" of an injustice. What are some biblical examples of people who "got in the way"? Have you gotten in the way of an unjust situation in your community? If so, what does this say about our identity as a church?
- The Seventh-day Adventist Church was formed largely by young people who were not afraid to follow God's leading. What role or influence do young people have in your local church or in the administrative hierarchy of the world church?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: Isaiah 58:11-14; Luke 1:46-55; Revelation 21:22-27.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

Seventh-day Adventists, including your students, are part of a long line of God's people throughout history. The Jewish people in the time of Ezra were bonded by the shared experience of their Babylonian captivity, not unlike the bond that forms among soldiers in time of war. As young people today seek to find their place in their community and world, many teens feel isolated, longing to belong to a group that shares a common purpose.

The book of Ezra is a historical sourcebook (as is the book of Nehemiah) that presents the outworking of God's plan to restore Jewish nationhood by providing another opportunity for them to cooperate with His purposes and demonstrate their right to exist as a nation. This week's lesson shows how a few people, led by determined leaders, can do great things for God.

Ezra is one of only three books in the Bible (along with Esther and Nehemiah) pertaining to the period of Jewish history following the Babylonian exile (after 586 B.C.). All the events described take place in the first half of the Persian Empire, which lasted from 539 B.C. (with the fall of Babylon to the forces of Cyrus) to 331 B.C. (when Darius III died and the empire of Alexander the Great rose to prominence).

The Persian Empire spanned from Iran in the east to the coast of Asia Minor in the west to the Armenian highlands in the north and the border of Egypt to the south. Founded by Cyrus, it was his policy to appease

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* Prophets and Kings. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

The Past, Present in Pictures

Photographs of the archaeological sites of biblical places mentioned in a lesson, or artifacts from those sites, bring the past to life. Students will see that these places were as real as the places they see around them now. There are numerous books and World Wide Web sites that feature such photos, which can be easily presented to your students. An image search using the word "Darius" will find you many sites.

nations conquered by Babylon to resettle them in their old homes and restore their places of worship. In general, the kings of Persia attempted to rule their empire in a humane and equitable manner practicing honesty and supporting the interests of the peoples they governed.

When Cyrus took Babylon he became acquainted with Daniel, who was then very old. Through Daniel, Cyrus learned about Isaiah's prophecies concerning him and the role he was to play in behalf of God's people (see Isaiah 44:21–45:13). He died in a military campaign against unruly eastern tribes after a nine-year reign.

Cambyses, the eldest son of Cyrus, reigned for almost eight years, followed by the short reign of the false Smerdis. Upon his ascendancy, Darius I permitted the Temple work to resume, and his era was marked by prosperity and order. The Jews, as did the other nations within the empire, benefited from his wise rule. Under the spiritual leadership of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, they finished the Temple and dedicated it in the sixth year of the reign of Darius I in 515 B.C. (Adapted from *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary,* vol. 3, pp. 320-322.)

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Read and discuss the paragraph found on page 576 of *Prophets and Kings* that is seen in Thursday's daily thought-provoker, paying particular attention to this sentence: "Could Christians realize how many times the Lord has ordered their way, that the purposes of the enemy concerning them might not be accomplished, they would not stumble along complainingly." Ask your students if they can recall an experience that, perhaps after the fact, they realized had been influenced by the hand of God.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

God's people are being led by Him today just as surely as He has led His people in the past. We even have a modern-day prophet to help us. While we may not be literal temple builders, there are responsibilities given us that require our full commitment to His leading, proper stewardship of our time and resources, and unity of purpose that will lead us to the heavenly Promised Land to live with God forever.

Our identity as God's last-day people, who will stand firm in Him even in the face of personal peril, will be seen ever more clearly as we draw nearer to the day of His coming. That identity is being forged today, in matters great and small, as we live out our commitment to God and to His precepts. Let us Seventh-day Adventists be constantly aware of who we are and what we believe, and not abbreviate who we are and what we stand for.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty and Ruin*),* chapter 46.

*A special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings* has been created by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Ezra 4–6.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 46.

temple building and you



ALLEN O'BRIEN

key text

"We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago."

(Ezra 5:11, NIV)

flashlight

"This was a time of wonderful opportunity for the Jews. The highest agencies of heaven were working on the hearts of kings, and it was for the people of God to labor with the utmost activity to carry out the decree of Cyrus. They should have spared no effort to restore the temple and its services, and to re-establish themselves in their Judean homes. But in the day of God's power many proved unwilling. The opposition of their enemies was strong and determined, and gradually the builders lost heart" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 572).

what do you think?

If you could design a Seventh-day Adventist church sanctuary from scratch, and money were no object, what elements would you include, if any, from the list below?

___ cushioned pews
___ wood floor
___ small electric organ
___ large pipe organ
___ piano
___ large screen and projector
___ plush, soft carpet on the floor
___ regular-size clear windows

Although these are important components of the structure of a church, none of these external things say anything about the identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When you think of the identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, you need to think of the distinctive beliefs that this church embraces. The beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are founded on Bible truth.

did you know?

The name "Seventh-day Adventist" was purposefully chosen as a testimony to our beliefs, "Seventh-day," of course, referring to the Sabbath, and "Adventist" referring to our belief in the second coming of Christ. Currently the Seventh-day Adventist Church numbers more than 21,912,161 members worldwide organized into nearly 95,297 churches and 72,975 companies.

INTO THE STORY

"Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Joshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, supporting them."

"As soon as the copy of the letter of King Artaxerxes was read . . . , they went immediately to the Jews in Jerusalem and compelled them by force to stop.

"Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia."

"King Darius then issued an order, and they searched in the archives stored in the treasury at Babylon."

"Do not interfere with the work on this temple of God. Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its site.

"Moreover, I hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God:

"Their expenses are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, . . . so that the work will not stop. Whatever is needed . . . must be given them daily without fail, so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons.

"Furthermore, I decree that if anyone defies this edict, a beam is to be pulled from their house and they are to be impaled on it. And for this crime their house is to be made a pile of rubble. May God, who has caused his Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem.

"I Darius have decreed it. Let it be carried out with diligence."

"So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia."

(Ezra 5:1, 2; 4:23, 24; 6:1, 7-12, 14, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Why did the Temple rebuilders cease work during the reign of King Artaxerxes?

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The passage tells us that the prophets helped the Jews build the Temple. What does that tell us about the role of a prophet?

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Why do you think King Darius was so kind to the Jewish people?

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What role did records maintained in archives play in Ezra's chronicle of the Temple rebuilding?

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What lessons can we learn from the account of the efforts of God's people to rebuild the Temple over time? How can we apply these lessons to advance the unity and identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church over time?

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punch lines

"But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" **(Joshua 24:15, NIV).**

" 'Do not be afraid,' Samuel replied. 'You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart' " **(1 Samuel 12:20, NIV).**

"Jesus replied: ' "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" ' " **(Matthew 22:37, NIV).**

further insight

"God has a purpose in sending trial to His children. He never leads them otherwise than they would choose to be led if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose that they are fulfilling."

—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 578

Sabbath

Read Ezra 6:8, 9.

Here is a statement about stewardship that summarizes each person's responsibility to serve God with the possessions and abilities that He has given to us.

"We acknowledge God's ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow human beings, and by returning tithe and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church" (Fundamental Belief 21, Stewardship).

What does Temple building in Old Testament times and today have to do with stewardship (both in time and resources)?

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Sunday

Read Haggai 1:13.

The remnant in today's Bible reading moved forward in rebuilding the Temple even when faced with opposition to obey God.

Had *you* been one of those Temple builders, what would be going through your mind as you felt moved by God to do His work yet were faced with armed resistance? What can you learn from Ezra and those faithful Israelites who kept building the wall in spite of fierce opposition from their enemies? How can you prepare spiritually for the conflict?

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Monday

Read Matthew 22:37-39.

This week's lesson chronicles the efforts of God's people over time to follow God's leading in rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. Have you ever felt resistance as you sought to serve God with all your heart? How can you apply the principles from the Bible passage for today when you are facing resistance?

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Tuesday

Read Luke 14:28.

The *Flashlight* quote taken from Ellen White's *Prophets and Kings* notes that the Temple builders in the days of Babylonian King Cyrus lost their enthusiasm for following God's leading in rebuilding the Temple. Have you ever been involved with an effort to build a church, literally with your labor, perhaps as part of a short-term mission project? What impact did that experience have on you? Have you been or are you part of a project to raise funds for a new church home for your congregation? If so, was or is the congregation fully supportive, or is it divided? The Old Testament Temple builders were guided by prophets, so there was strong evidence of God's leading. How do we discern God's leading today?

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Wednesday

Read 1 Samuel 12:20.

The word "heart" is seen in the chosen *Punch Lines* as well as in *Flashlight*. The love and service to God noted in these texts are Christian hallmarks. Yet there are times that Christians may lose heart from any number of causes. Indeed, it may be that a Christian has done something truly evil, yet Samuel's admonition to God's people of his day to serve the Lord with all their heart remains true for us today. Through God's grace we are given opportunity to claim His forgiveness for being faint of heart or worse.

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Thursday

Read 1 Chronicles 22:13 and 2 Chronicles 15:7.

How are you involved in the life of your church? Are you willing to share your abilities and gifts to advance the cause of God? Read and reflect upon this remarkable paragraph from page 576 of *Prophets and Kings* that speaks about God's leading, those who follow in faith, and how He uses us *today* in His service:

"To His children today the Lord declares, 'Be strong, . . . and work: for I am with you.' The Christian always has a strong helper in the Lord. The way of the Lord's helping we may not know; but this we do know: He will never fail those who put their trust in Him. Could Christians realize how many times the Lord has ordered their way, that the purposes of the enemy concerning them might not be accomplished, they would not stumble along complainingly. Their faith would be stayed on God, and no trial would have power to move them. They would acknowledge Him as their wisdom and efficiency, and He would bring to pass that which He desires to work out through them."

Friday

Read 1 Corinthians 15:58.

According to this Bible passage, what are the character traits of the person who labors for the Lord? How will you apply these qualities in your personal life?

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this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapter 46.

**Royalty and Ruin* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it by going to www.cornerstoneconnections.net and clicking on "Conflict of the Ages series." By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.