

LIFE POINT

The church sings to
praise and thank
God

THE PEOPLE SANG



LEADER BIBLE STUDY

CONTEXT AND COMMENTARY FOR PERSONAL STUDY AND PREPARATION

(For age-appropriate language, use the Bible story on the following pages.)

LIFE POINT

The church sings
to praise and
thank God.

**LEVEL OF
BIBLICAL
LEARNING**

Churches gather
together to worship and
respond to God

**SCRIPTURE
REFERENCE**

Ezra 2:68–3:1-13

BIBLE VERSE

Oh come, let us
worship and bow
down; let us kneel
before the
Lord, our Maker!
Psalm 95:6

In many cities, construction is often seen as a nuisance that causes traffic delays and forces cars to navigate through tight rows of orange cones. Yet the same buildings that cause criticism while being built are often celebrated when they are complete. Some even hold ribbon-cutting ceremonies to mark the occasion, proving it is much easier to celebrate the finished product than the process involved.

When the Jewish prisoners of Babylon, held captive for nearly 70 years, returned home to Jerusalem, they immediately began to resurrect the city that had been destroyed. Inspired by God, King Cyrus decreed that the people return to rebuild the temple of "the God of Israel" (Ezra 1:1-3). Many of them were returning to a place they only knew through stories, while a few returned to the home they loved and remembered.

Rebuilding the temple was a massive undertaking, but the Israelites continued to worship throughout the entire process. They worshiped God through sacrifice when they participated in the festivals and reentered into the rhythms of their faith. They worshiped God through generosity by giving their valuable possessions to the rebuilding efforts. They worshiped God through work as they rebuilt the altar for the Lord. They worshiped God through remembering what He had done and His promises for the future. They worshiped God through music by singing praises to Him with gratitude in their hearts. When the foundation of the temple was complete, all the people erupted in praise. They sang, played music, and worshiped God with their voices. Those who remembered the original temple wept, but many others rejoiced. Scripture says their combined voices created a sound that could be "heard far away." The temple was not a finished product, but the people believed the promises of God would be fulfilled.

Take some time to read Ecclesiastes 3 and consider the various seasons of your life. What was your response to God through each season? The Bible is clear: no matter what we face, we should praise God. In our exile, in our grief, and in our joy, He is to be glorified and worshiped (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Philippians 4:4; Psalm 34:1; Job 1:21). As you pray this week, thank God for walking with you through every season of your life. Ask Him to show you His presence in the finished products, the processes, and everything in between. Ask for a heart of worship that can be "heard far away" so that your worship will reflect God's glory to others.



TELL THE STORY

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

Instruct preteens to sing a silly repeat-after-me song that you will lead (for example, Boom Chicka Boom, Down By The Bay). When you finish, say, "Like how I led you in a song, in our story, we will see that God's people lead in song to praise and to thank God."

1. GETTING TO THE POINT

- Lead preteens in singing "Come Let's Worship (Psalm 95:6)" together. Show the teaching picture and say: "Singing songs is just one way we worship God. Today we will hear how God called people in the Old Testament to worship Him by building a special altar, gathering there, and singing praises to Him."

2. LOOK IN THE BOOK

Ask: "Can you name some ministries our church's offerings support?"

State: "Our church's offerings may support ministries like food pantries, international missionaries, families in need, or children's homes. Our church's offerings also support our church staff and building expenses."

Say: "Today we will learn how the Israelites' offerings helped rebuild the temple in Jerusalem." Display the teaching picture and direct preteens to find Ezra 2:68-69.

Ask: a volunteer to read the passage aloud.

Say: "This passage teaches that each Israelite gave what he could, generously and willingly."

Ask: "How much did the Israelites offer?" (61,000 gold coins, 6,250 pounds of silver, 100 priestly garments)

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Ezra 3:1-3.

State: "The Israelites did more than bring God their offerings. What does verse 2 say they did?" (They built an altar to offer burnt offerings.)

Ask: "According to verse 4, what were the Israelites celebrating during this time?" (Festival of Shelters, also called the Feast of Booths and the Feast of Tabernacles)

Encourage preteens to work in pairs to complete "At the Altar" and "Festival Time!" on their Kids Activity Pages. When finished, allow volunteers to share the answers.

Stress that during the Feast of Booths, the Israelites celebrated the fall harvest of crops. They also celebrated the booths or temporary dwellings they lived in after they escaped from Egypt.

Say: "The people continued making plans to rebuild the temple. They paid money to stonecutters and artisans. They gave food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre for the purchase of cedar wood from Lebanon. When it was time to lay the foundation of the Lord's temple, the Levites supervised the work."



TELL THE STORY

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Ezra 3:10-12.

Say: "The Israelites were so excited to see the temple foundation laid that they sang to God with praise and thanksgiving and shouted for joy! Yet, many of the older priests, Levites, and family heads who had seen the first temple cried loudly at the sight. Their joyful shouting and loud crying were heard far away!"

State: "God wants us to follow the Israelites' example. He calls His church to gather to worship and respond to Him, to sing songs which praise and thank Him."

REVIEW QUESTIONS

- Upon arriving in Jerusalem, what type of offering did some family heads bring? (freewill or voluntary offerings)
- What did the Israelites do in month seven? (gathered)
- What did the Israelites do during this gathering? (brought sacrifices and offerings)
- When the temple's foundation was laid, what did Levites lead people to do? (sing praises and offer thanks to God)
- Why do Christians no longer offer animal sacrifices? (Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice for people through His death on the cross.)
- Why are Christians no longer required to go to specific places to worship God? (Because of Jesus' sacrifice, Christians can worship God anywhere.)



BIBLE LEARNING ACTIVITIES

STATION 1

Say “In our story (Ezra 3:1-7), the people followed ALL of God’s commands and gave what they had to obey God. Different people gave different things, but every gift made a difference”. Take turns saying what you can give to God. On your turn, say something that starts with the letter “A” that you can give to God. The next person says what the previous item was, and now adds something that starts with “B”. Play continues with listing all the previous items, and adding one more thing you can give to God (“We can give God apples, books, and a car...”). Try to get through the entire alphabet!

STATION 2

Play a game that uses the concept of gathering something. Like Hungry Hungry Hippos, War (deck of cards), Spoons, Go Fish, or Left Center Right. Say, “Like how the people in the story gathered together to praise God, and how the church gathers together to praise God, we had to gather together items to win the game.”

STATION 3

Name that tune. Say, “Just like how the people in our story sang to God using a song they knew, we will listen to songs that we use today to praise God.” Play Christian songs that kids should know from your phone (**CF kids playlist link here**). The first team to correctly guess the name of the song, who sings it, or sing the next lyrics of the song gets a point! Play several rounds.

STATION 4

Using toothpicks, dry spaghetti noodles, and marshmallows, instruct preteens to build a model of what they would want a church to look like.

STATION 5

Using musical instruments, direct kids to sing a song to God. Play a song loudly from your phone or a speaker as they sing and play along. Say “God wants people to gather in church to worship Him. One way we worship Him is through songs that praise and thank Him even more!” Talk about how one way to serve at church is to use your voice or instruments to help others sing to God, and talk about what the adult worship service looks like.