

SESSION 7: THE RETURN, THE MACCABEAN REVOLT

Lesson Overview

The exiles from Judah return to the Land in session 7, chastened and ready to rebuild not just their land but their lives. Jeff Cavins explains how the return occurs in three waves that start when King Cyrus of Persia sends them home to rebuild the Temple in 537 BC. Zerubbabel, a man in David's line, leads this first effort. Following him are Ezra, who teaches the people, and Nehemiah, who heads the rebuilding of the Jerusalem walls. Obstacles to building will be explained, and the way God helps them to triumph.

The Jews are essentially faithful to God during the period of the Return, but the rise of Greek influence threatens their identity and eventually their lives. When Antiochus Euphianes desecrates the Temple and tries to force the Jews to abandon their faith, they revolt. Led by Judas Maccabeus and his sons, they enter a period of self-rule that ends after Rome rises to power.

STEP 1: Opening Review (fifteen minutes)

Begin each subsequent week with a brief review of the previous lesson or of the story thus far.

This might be a good time to have participants practice learning the period colors using their beads. As time goes on, make it a contest. How many can recite the whole string?

Now and then you might have people take out their charts so you can test them: can they tell you which narrative books are in the time of the Royal Kingdom? Who in Jesus' bloodline is in the time of the Patriarchs? Can anyone give you a one-sentence description of the period you just finished? And so on.

Memory Tip: You can remember the progression of world powers by this phrase built from the first letters of their names: Eat A Big Purple GRape (E=Egypt, A=Assyria, B=Babylon, G=Greece, R=Rome).

STEP 2: View DVD (thirty minutes)

The Student Workbook section for each lesson begins with a brief outline of Jeff Cavins' talk. Space is included for taking notes

Session 7
The Return
The Maccabean Revolt

Judah Returns to the Promised Land
Faithful Jews Fight to Preserve their Identity

NOTES

1. The Exiles Return to the Land

- 537 BC – Zerubbabel returns and rebuilds the Temple

- 458 BC – Ezra returns and teaches

- 444 BC – Nehemiah returns and rebuilds the Jerusalem walls

2. Obstacles to Rebuilding

3. The Rise of Greek Influence

4. The Jews Revolt

STEP 3: Small group discussion (thirty minutes)

These questions for group discussion pertain to the taped lecture for Session 7. Suggested responses are given below to help the leader guide the discussion.

1. The Return is characterized by the color yellow, representing brighter days as Judah returns to the land of Canaan after seventy years of exile.
2. God called on a foreign king, Cyrus of Persia, who was “stirred up by the Lord” to send back anyone who wants to return to Judah to live and to rebuild the Temple. Everyone who stays behind is told to help with silver, gold, and other freewill offerings. Cyrus provides building materials and returns the Temple treasure previously stolen by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

The prophet Isaiah had foretold this very event many years previously, with exact detail right down to Cyrus’ name.

3. Everything had been lost. The Jews had to rebuild the Temple, the city itself, and their lives. This latter included instruction in God’s Law. Each “return” tackled a different aspect of this rebuilding (see the event boxes on the chart).
4. Judah faced opposition from within and without on their return to Canaan. From the start, they were opposed by the Samaritans, who consider them a political threat. The Samaritans provide opposition every step of the way. From the inside, the rebuilding effort is compromised when the people stop working on the Temple in order to build their own homes. Later on, the Jewish leaders put heavy taxes on the common people to the point that they have to pawn their fields and houses and even their children. They overcome these obstacles of sin with the help of Haggai and Nehemiah, who called them to account and led reforms. Thanks to the ongoing and dedicated leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the community was established and brought under the rule of God’s law.
5. A policy of radical Hellenization threatened their Jewish identity. The Greeks—Antiochus Epiphanes in particular—imposed the worship of their gods and banned under penalty of death not just worship but all practices that separated the Jews from others (the Sabbath, circumcision, etc.). Many were being killed until a man named Mattathias and his sons stood up against them and launched an all-out campaign to fight for their faith. Ultimately, they were successful in pushing back the Greeks and maintained their own rule for a time.
6. Rather than conforming to Greek ways and abandoning their religion, many of the Jews resisted and fought back, risking their lives in the process. 1 and 2 Maccabees are full of heroic stories of resistance and martyrs. Clearly they have learned the lessons of the exile and would rather follow God than abandon Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What color is used to characterize the Return, and why?
2. What unlikely person did God use to return His people to the Promised Land, and how?
3. What three kinds of rebuilding were necessary when the Jews returned?
4. What kinds of opposition did they face, and how did they overcome them?
5. What kind of crisis confronted the Jews at the beginning of the Maccabean period, when Greece became the world power?
6. Based on the story of the Maccabees, what evidence do you see that Israel is learning to trust God?

7. The catalyst for the Maccabean Revolt was the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes, and the war started by the courageous Mattathias led three years later to the taking back of the Temple and its purification. According to the Talmud, oil enough for one lamp lasted miraculously eight days. The event is commemorated today as Hanukah—the Festival of Lights. The miracle of the oil, while not recorded in Scripture, gives us our color for this period: orange, for the light in the lamps.
8. Answers will vary.
9. One way to look at this question is to see what has been fulfilled of God’s covenant with Abraham. He has had many descendants; they have inherited and inhabited the promised land of Canaan, lost it and returned. They did become a royal kingdom but are now under foreign rule. It has been hundreds of years since someone in David’s line has sat on the throne. The promise of worldwide blessing was fulfilled in a limited sense in Egypt, when Joseph saved many nations from starvation, and again under David and Solomon, but this promise seems to have foundered.

Another way to look at it is to follow the “God’s Family Plan” icons on the chart: what began with a covenant relationship with a couple, Adam and Eve, grew to a family with Noah and his wife and sons, a tribe under Abraham, a nation under Moses, and a kingdom under David. Great progress has been made and yet something still separates God from His children.
10. There remains the problem of sin: man’s fallen nature still separates him from God. Even with all the benefits and advice and help God has given them, Israel can’t seem to follow Him as He asks.

There also remains the problem of the broken covenant. This is a problem: how can God pay out the terms of the covenant, which demand death for the guilty party, and at the same time keep His promises?

How will God move to solve these two things?

STEP 4: Closing

Gather discussion groups together for the close. Have each share one thing they learned or ask them together to comment on the significance of the periods.

7. Why is the color orange used to represent the period of the Maccabean Revolt?

8. What have you learned from these two periods that you can apply to your own life?

9. We have completed the Old Testament story. What positive progress has been made in God's plan to restore His children to Himself?

10. What is left to be done?

CLOSING PRAYER

God's plan unfolded through history and gives us the Story for our lives. Let us pray in the name of Jesus:

You brought the exiles home; they rebuilt the Temple and Jerusalem and were taught once more from your law:

–Rebuild our broken hearts and lives as we return to you.

The Maccabees stood up against the threats of Hellenization:

–Help us resist worldliness in our culture and follow only you.

Our Father...

Sample

Explain the Home Study assignment for the following and final week, which will be the two New Testament periods, 11 and 12: Messianic Fulfillment and The Church. Because we have come to the end of the Old Testament, another review of the periods precedes the usual preparation.

Prayer:

Lead participants in the Responsive Prayer found on page 46 of the Student Workbook or just pray the portion that applies to this lesson.

HOME STUDY: LOOKING AHEAD

The Old Testament is finished, and the time for fulfillment of God's promises has come! God's people have been waiting for the Messiah for centuries and the long years of spiritual exile end at last in the period of Messianic Fulfillment. Will the Jews recognize the Son of Man and the Kingdom He has come to establish on Earth?

At the close of His earthly ministry Jesus commissions His apostles to spread the message of salvation to the ends of the earth. The seed of Abraham, bearing fruit in the Church, will now become a blessing to the world.

- Use your chart to fill in the following information about these time periods:

Period name: Messianic Fulfillment Time period: 0 - 33 AD

Period color: Gold Color meaning: The gifts of the Magi

Narrative book: Luke Supplemental books: Matthew, Mark, and John

(Note: The four Gospels are of equal importance; the narrative book was chosen from among the synoptics because it includes the infancy narrative and therefore provides a more complete story of the history covered in the Bible Timeline.)

Period name: The Church Time period: 33 AD - Present

Period color: White Color meaning: The spotless bride of Christ

Name the three "waves of witness" that form the structure of this period:

Witness in Jerusalem Witness in Judea and Samaria

Witness to the ends of the Earth

Sample

- You may already be familiar with the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, which tell the story of the two final periods in the Bible Timeline. It is difficult to pull just a few representative passages from them. To prepare for the lesson on Messianic Fulfillment and the Church, you might choose from among the following readings.

Messianic Fulfillment:

Luke 1–4	The announcement and birth and temptation of the Messiah
Luke 6:12–36	The Twelve Apostles; “Sermon on the Plain”
Luke 9:1–36	Sending out the Twelve; feeding the 5,000; Peter’s confession of Christ; the Transfiguration
Luke 22–24	Last Supper, Passion, Resurrection

The Church:

Acts 2	Pentecost
Acts 7–8	Stephen’s martyrdom; the message begins to spread
Acts 9–11	Saul’s conversion; Peter’s vision

Please turn the page for *Home Study: Review*.

Sample

HOME STUDY: REVIEW

- Using your memory bead wristband, review once more the names and color meanings of the Old Testament periods. Have you memorized the colors yet? Complete the list that you started on page 28:

	Period Name	Color	Meaning	Phrase
7	Divided Kingdom	Black	Israel's darkest period	Israel split into rival kingdoms and fell into idolatry
8	Exile	Baby Blue	"Singing the Blues" in "Baby-lon"	God punished first Israel, then Judah, with exile. Prophets brought a message of hope
9	Return	Yellow	Judah returning home to brighter days	God brought the exiles back to Canaan; they rebuilt the Temple and Jerusalem and were taught once more from the Law
10	Maccabean Revolt	Orange	Fire in the Oil lamps in the purified Temple	Mattathias and his sons stood up against the threats of Hellenization
11	Messianic Fulfillment	Gold	Gifts of the Magi	God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ the Messiah, to fulfill all His promises
12	The Church	White	The spotless bride of Christ	The Church carries on God's work in the world