

# The Story – Chapter 19

## Introduction

This week, we look at Chapters 19 in *The Story*, which covers the return to Judah seventy years later

Once again, these stories are also found in the Bible, but in lots of different places. If you don't have *The Story* book, you can read Daniel 1-3, and 6; Jeremiah 29-31; Ezra 1-6; Haggai 1-2; and Zechariah 1 and 8.

## Summary of Chapters 19 – *The Return Home*

Persian rulers were far more benevolent than their Babylonian and Assyrian predecessors. The Persians were sympathetic to the religious needs of the people they ruled. So Persia's King Cyrus issued a decree to repatriate all aliens to their homelands while allowing them some degree of self-rule. And thus the people of Israel began their journey home in 539.

Under the guidance of the Hebrew leader, Zerubbabel, nearly 50,000 Jews returned to Jerusalem. They were intent on rebuilding, and the temple was the first priority. They rebuilt the altar and prepared sacrifices in accordance with the Law of Moses. However, the locals didn't welcome the repatriated Judeans. They intimidated the Jews and construction halted.

Sixteen years later the prophet, Haggai, spoke on God's behalf, and encouraged the people to return to rebuilding the temple. They did and in 516 B.C., the second temple was completed. Although the new temple would not have the splendor of the old one, God promised to shower Jerusalem and Judah with His goodness and make Israel a blessing to the world.

## Discussion Questions

1. When permission to return was given by the Persian king, many of the Israelite exiles chose to stay in Babylon instead of returning home to the Promised Land? If you had been an Israelite exile in Babylon when King Cyrus permitted your return, would you have returned to the Promised Land or would you have remained in Babylon? Why?
2. What did Israel's enemies do to undermine their efforts to rebuild their temple (*The Story*, p. 265)? Have you ever experienced a similar situation, in which someone tried to undermine something important to you? How did you respond?
3. Haggai, the prophet, encouraged the people to get back to work on the temple building project that had stalled for 16 years (*The Story*, p. 266). Are there areas of your spiritual growth that have stalled out? Is there someone you could partner with to hold yourself accountable in this area?
4. When the temple reconstruction was completed, some Israelites were overjoyed and some were heartbroken because the new temple was no match to the glory of Solomon's temple. According to Haggai's second message (*The Story*, p. 267-68), how can we miss God's call in the present when we linger on the past? Have you ever seen this happen in your life or in the life of someone you know? What helped to move forward?