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Rebuilding Jerusalem

Ezra 1–4; Zechariah 9; Nehemiah 1–9

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In the year that Cyrus of Persia became emperor, he allowed all the people who had been made exiles by the Babylonians to return to their homeland.

God said, "In order to show the many nations that I am holy, I will bring my people back from all the countries where their enemies live.

Ezekiel 39:27

The day came when the Jews who had been taken to Babylon were allowed to go back home. They longed to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Indeed, the Persians allowed them to take with them some of the gold and silver treasures that had been looted from it years before. Even so, it was the people themselves who put their own money into a rebuilding fund and set to work.

When the time came for the foundation to be laid, they began with songs of worship. The priests played the ceremonial trumpets and the musicians clashed the cymbals. Some shouted for joy; others, who had seen the first Temple burned, wept with emotion.

In spite of everyone's eagerness, there were problems. Judah had not been empty during the exile. The people who had been living there offered to share the work. The Jews declined the offer, not wanting outside interference. Soon there was bad feeling, and fights broke out.

It was not just the building work that proved challenging. It was just as hard to rebuild the traditions of the faith and to celebrate the festivals as the Law required.

A prophet named Zechariah gave them hope.

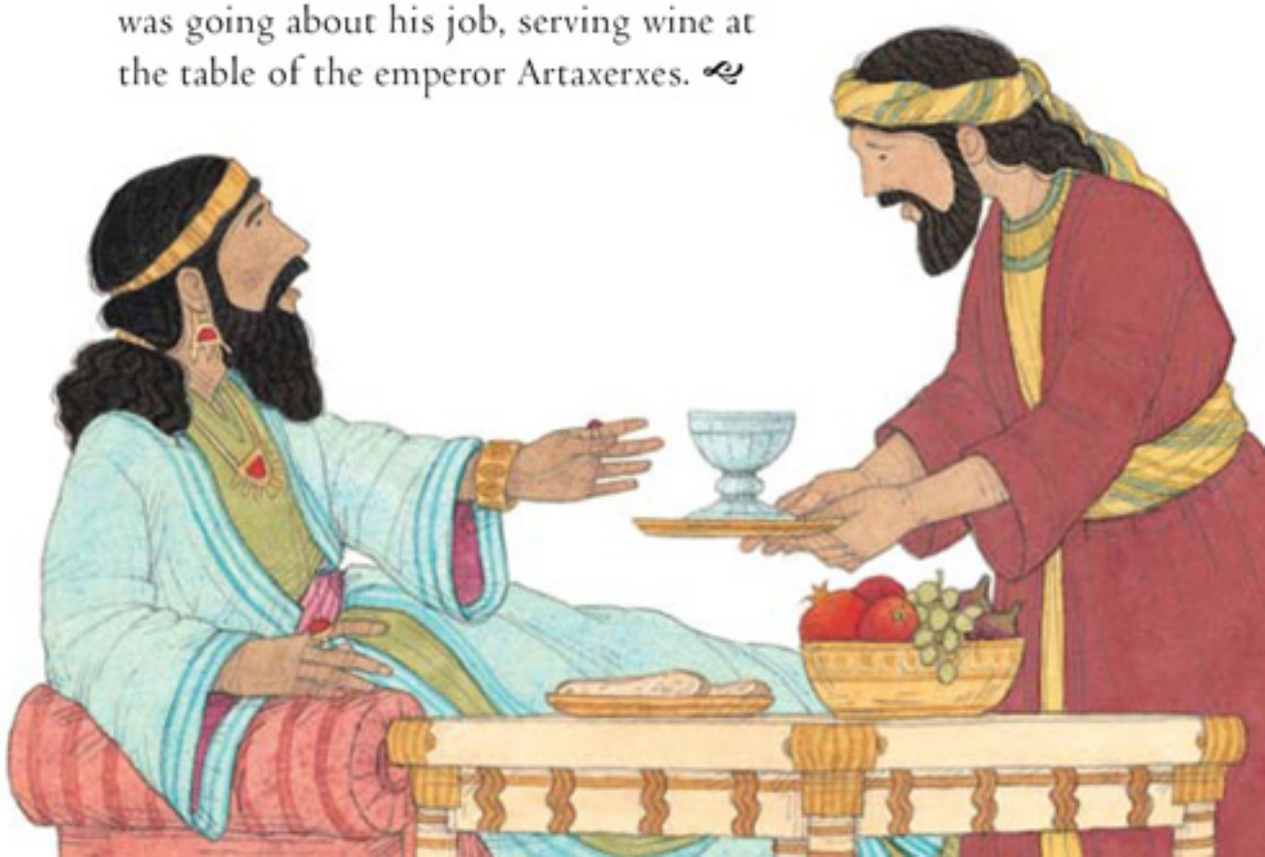
"Be joyful," he told them. "A new king is going to come. He will be a king of peace, who rides a donkey and not a warhorse.

"He will save his people, as a shepherd saves his flock from danger."

Meanwhile, there remained many Jews throughout the empire who had not gone back to Jerusalem. Among them was a man named Nehemiah. He was eager to hear news of the rebuilding… and disappointed by what he heard. He could not hide his sadness one day, when he was going about his job, serving wine at the table of the emperor Artaxerxes.

God says this: "I will make my people strong; they will worship and obey me."

Zechariah 10:12



They did so. As the crowd settled down, Jesus took the bread, said a prayer of thanks to God, and shared it out. He did the same with the fish.

Everyone took a portion of the food and passed it on. By a miracle, there was enough for everyone – about five thousand people. Everyone had as much as they wanted.

