



Story: Ezra Returns to Jerusalem

Supplies Needed

You will need the following:

17 Sheets of [Cardstock](#) (8.5" x 11")

17 3 mil Laminating [Film](#)

Directions

- Print pages 2-35 two-sided on cardstock. Laminate the pages.
- Hold up the pictures while you read the story.



Before holding up the picture:

What did we talk about last time in class? *(The Israelites finished the Temple)*

Hold up picture:

It has been approximately 57 years since the Temple was finished and this next lesson happens under the reign of Artaxerxes. Ezra was a Levite who was still living in Persia. The Bible calls Ezra a “skilled scribe.” What do you think that means? *(Answers might vary)* A scribe was someone who copied and studied the Law of Moses. Ezra was also a priest and the Bible says, “Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel.”

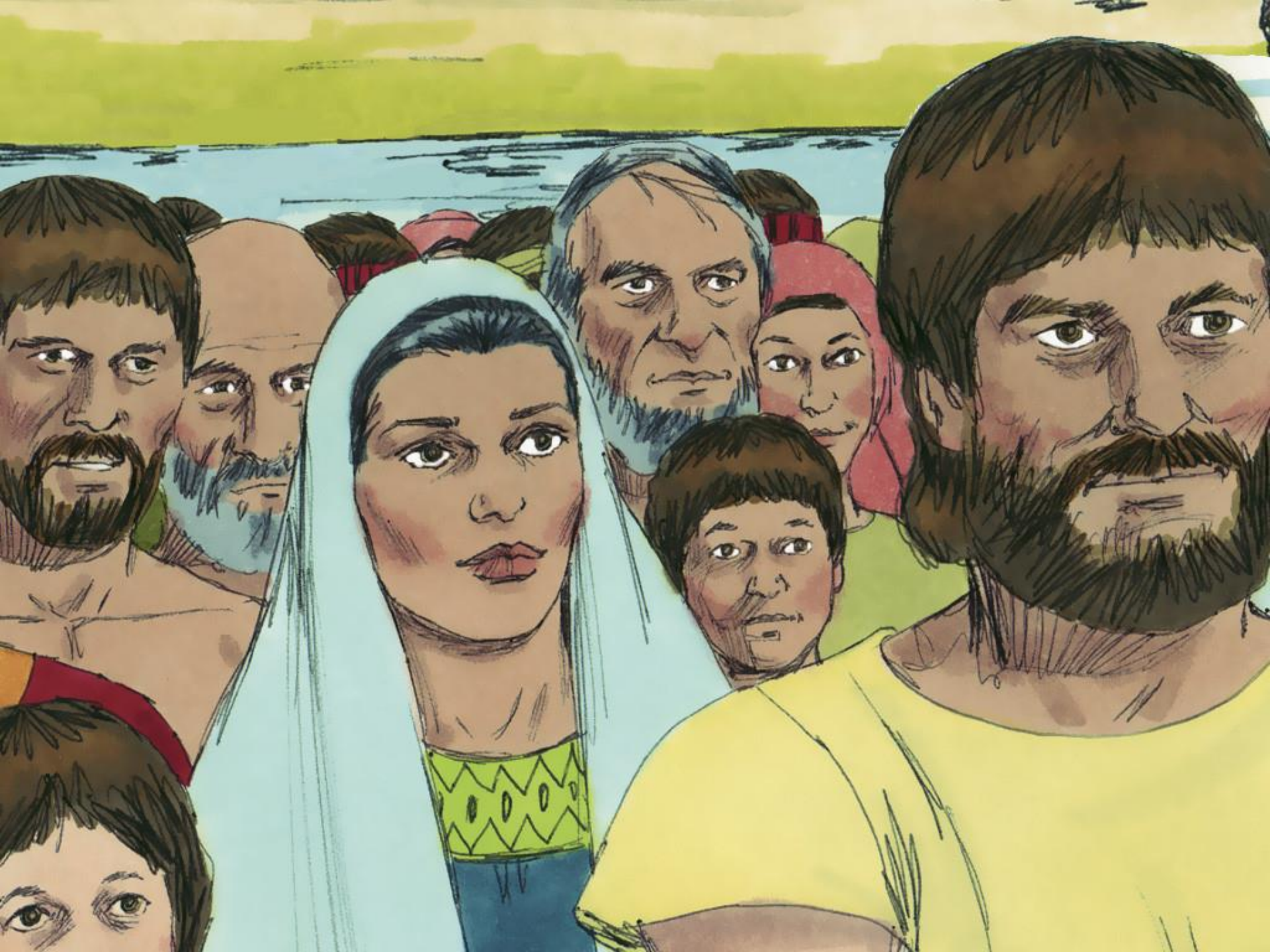
Explain / Ask:

They didn’t have copy machines back then, so if they needed a copy of God’s Word, a scribe like Ezra would have to copy each word very carefully. And because Ezra was copying God’s Word over and over, he knew the Law very well. And because Ezra knew the Law really well, he wanted to go and teach it to the Israelites in Jerusalem. Do you think the King is going to let him go to Jerusalem?



Hold up picture:

King Artaxerxes gave Ezra a letter giving him permission to return to Jerusalem to teach the laws of God and to appoint people to act as judges. The king entrusted him with gold and silver to use for offerings and worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. Ezra brought with him scrolls on which were written God's laws.



Hold up picture:

A group of Jews returning with Ezra gathered by the Ahava canal. Although there were priests in the crowd, there were no Levites or temple servants returning to Jerusalem. Ezra needed Levites to help him teach God's laws.



Persian Empire

Kasiphia

Jerusalem

Susa (Shushan)

Ethiopia

India

Hold up picture:

So Ezra sent messengers to Iddo, the leader of the Levites living in Kasiphia, asking him for help. Thirty-eight Levites responded to Ezra's plea and joined those returning to Jerusalem. They were joined by 220 Temple servants.

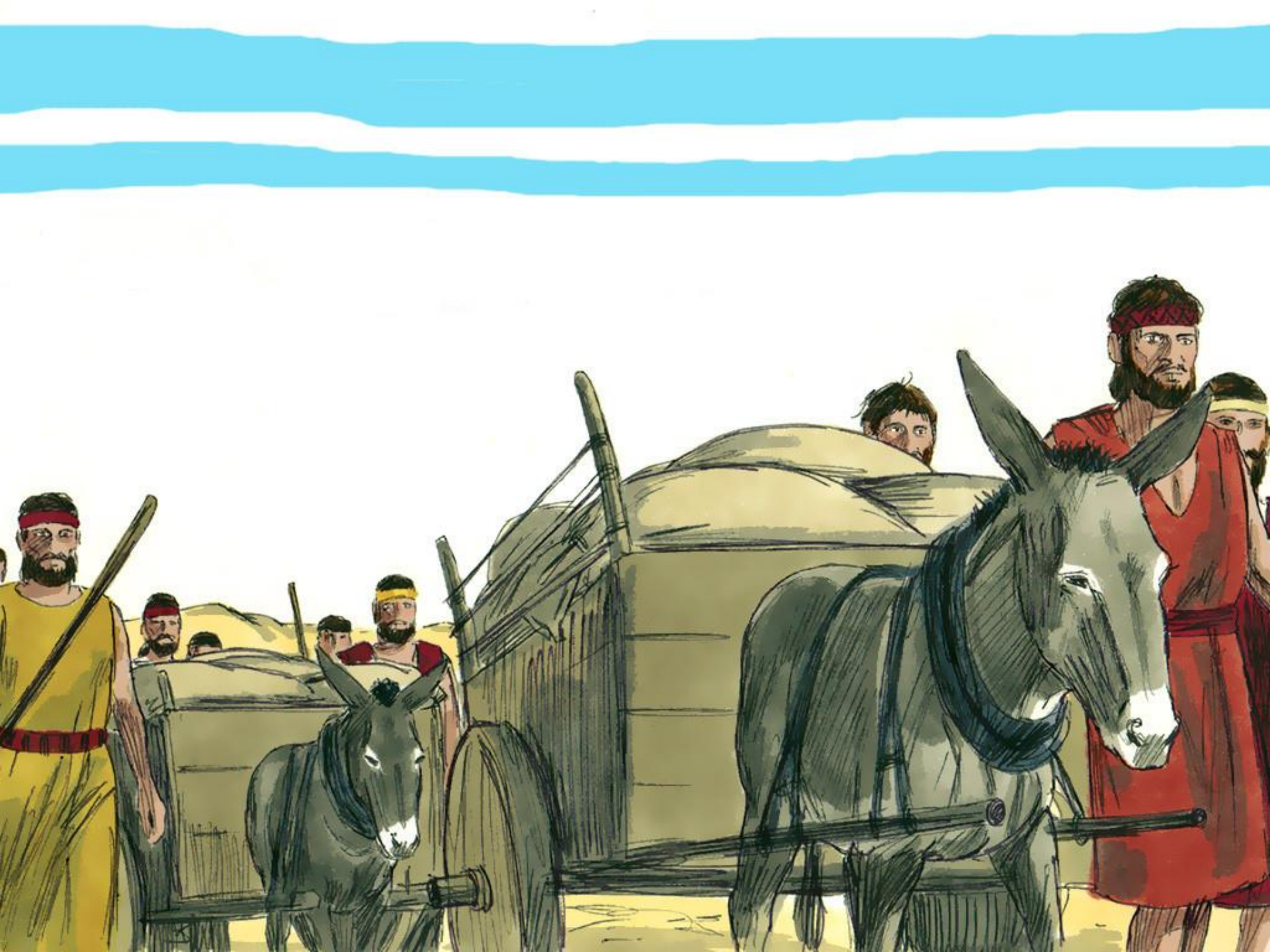


Hold up picture:

Ezra chose 12 of the leading priests and weighed out the gold, silver and articles the King had given for the Temple in Jerusalem. They weighed out 650 talents of silver and 100 talents of gold. Ezra asked these men to be responsible and guard all the treasures that were worth a fortune.

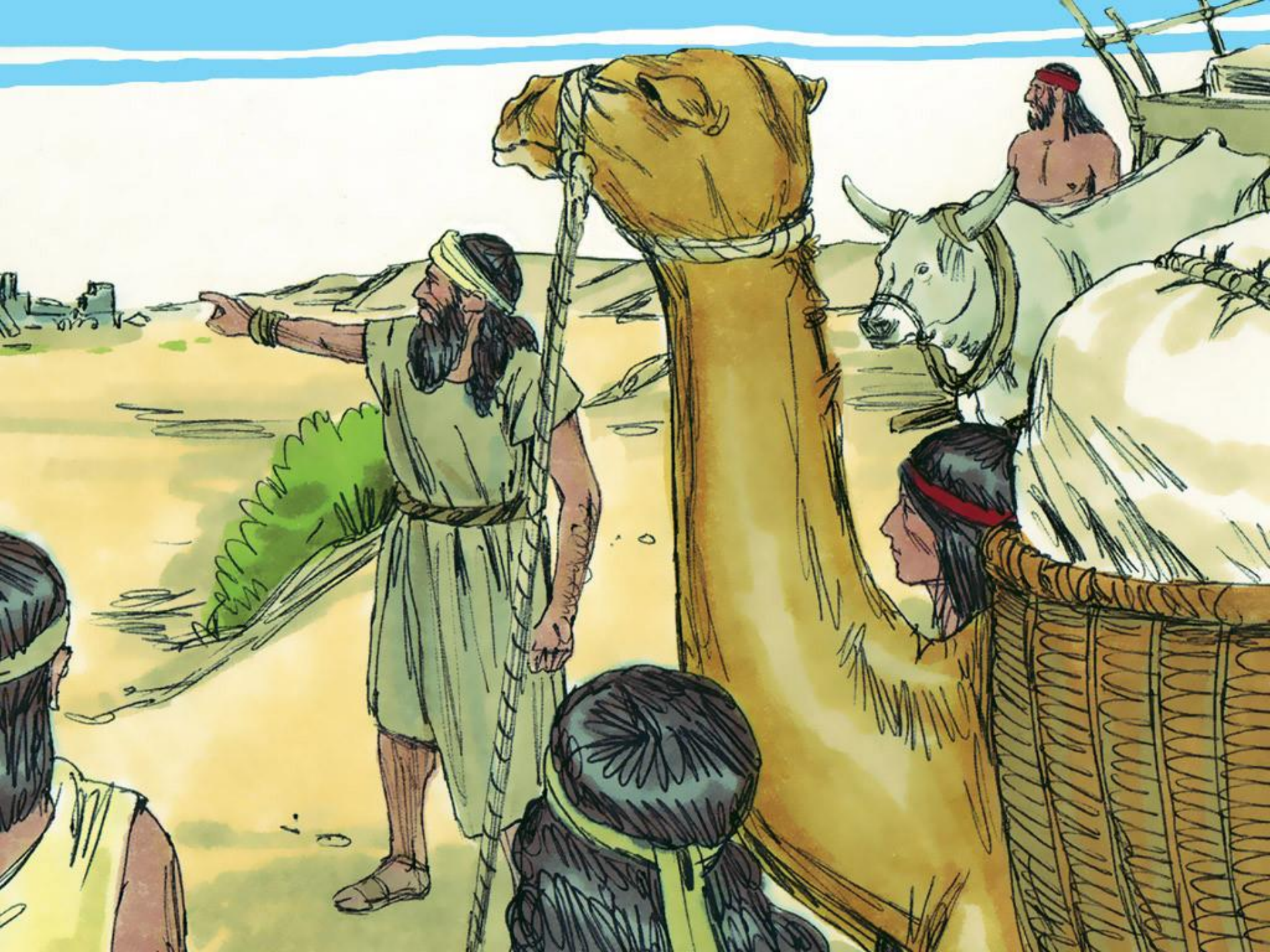
Explain:

A talent was a form of measurement for the Israelites. One talent is equal to about 75 pounds, so there was approximately 48,750 lbs of silver and 7,500 lbs of gold. That would be worth a LOT of money wouldn't it!? Would you be scared to travel with that much money/treasure? **(yes)** Do you think you might want some security guards or soldiers with you? **(probably)**



Hold up picture:

Ezra asked everyone to fast and pray for a safe trip to Jerusalem. He did not want to ask King Artaxerxes for soldiers to travel with them for protection because he had told the king that God protects those who turn to Him and shows His anger against those who forsake Him. So, the Israelites set off on their long journey trusting God to look after them and their valuable cargo.



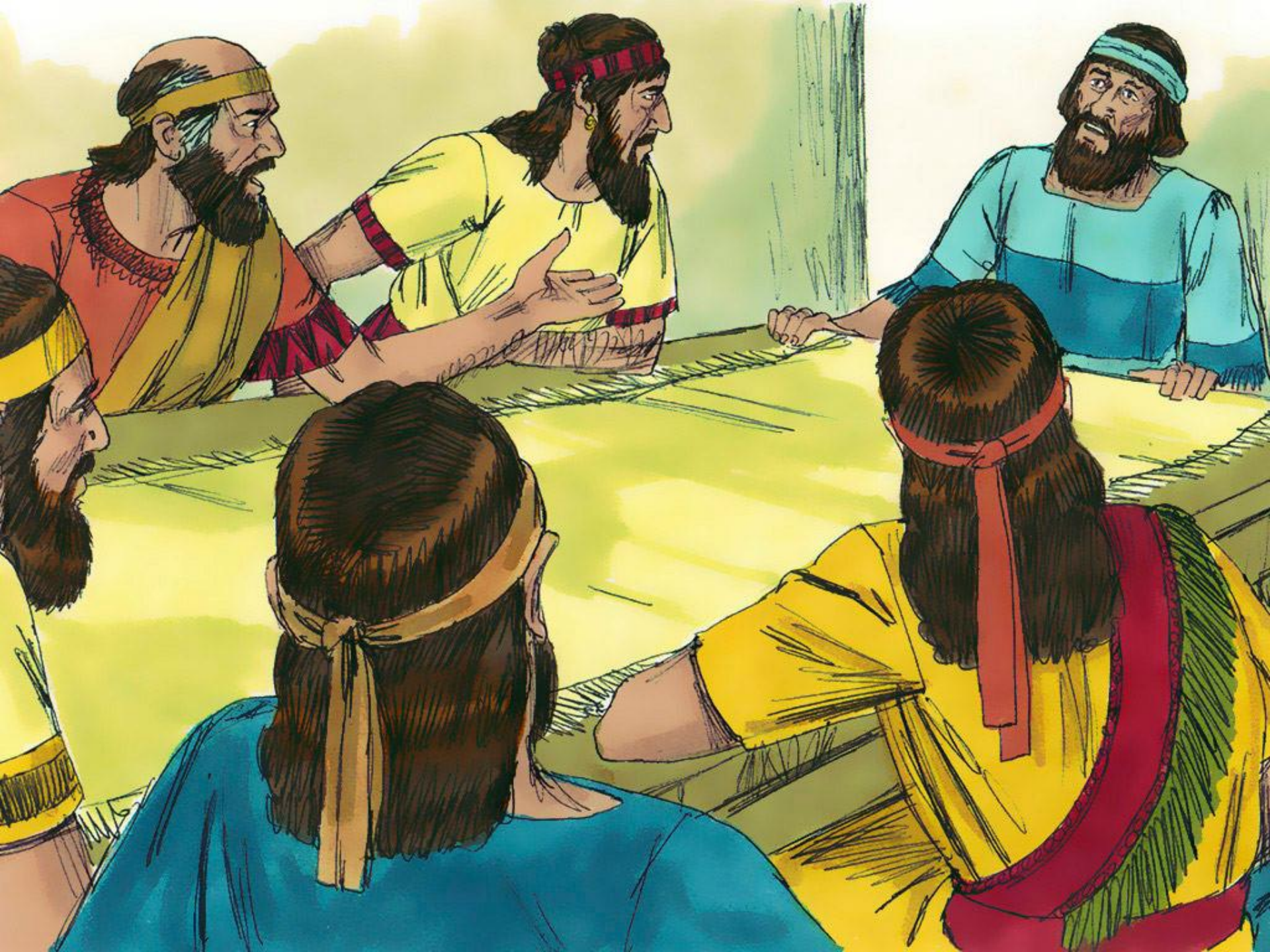
Hold up picture:

The trip took four months, but God's hand was over the Jewish caravan protecting them from any enemies and robbers along the way. At last Ezra and the Jews travelling with him got to Jerusalem. They set up camp and rested there for 3 days.



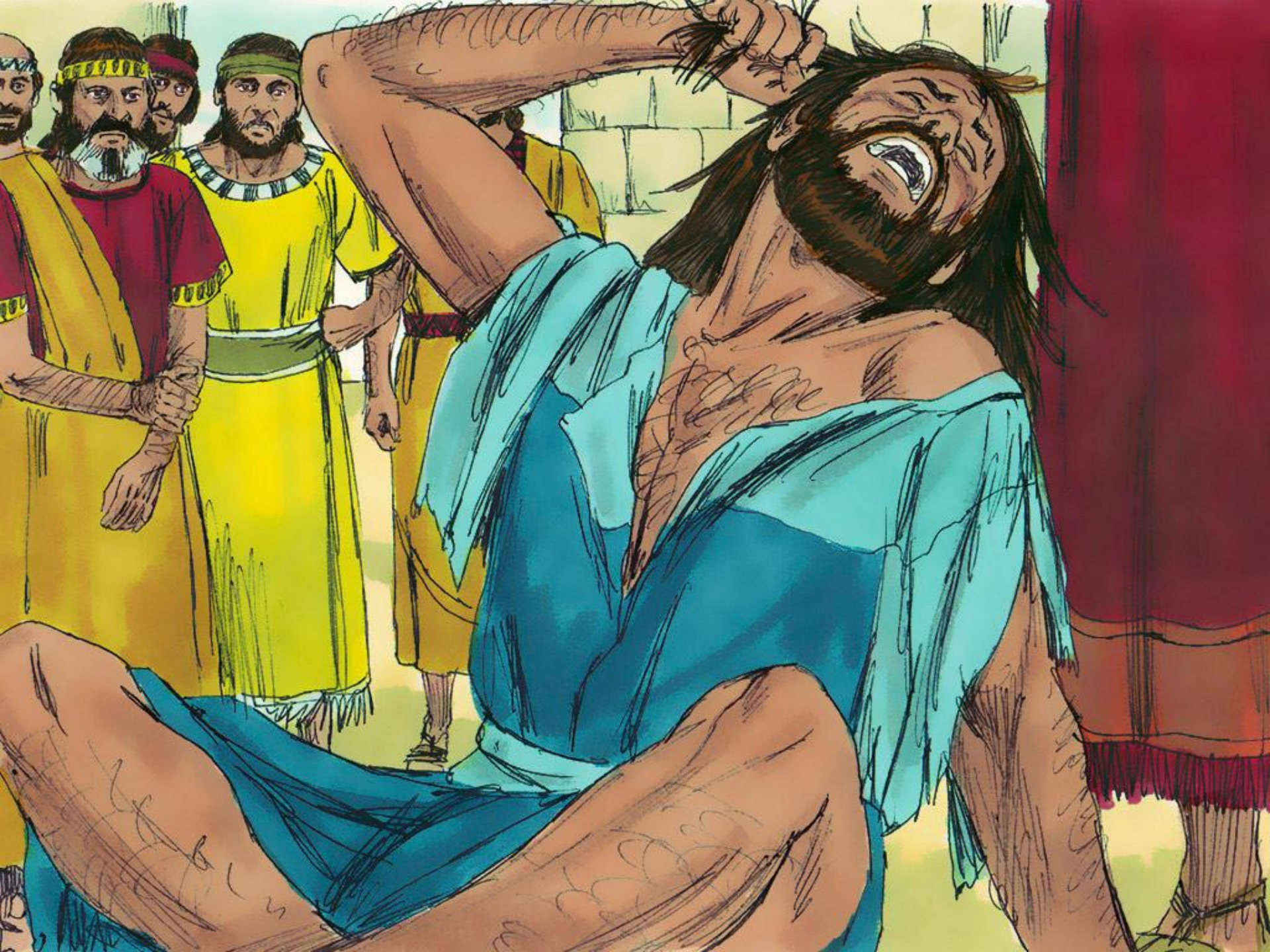
Hold up picture:

On the fourth day, the gold and silver was weighed again and entrusted to a priest named Meremoth. It was all there - nothing had been lost or stolen! Everyone then sacrificed burnt offerings to God. They sacrificed 12 bulls, 96 rams, 77 lambs, and 12 male goats as a sin offering.



Hold up picture:

Soon after returning to Jerusalem, the leaders came to Ezra to report that many of the Jews now living in the land, including priests and Levites, had married people from the neighboring countries who worshipped false gods.



Hold up picture:

Ezra was so upset at this news that he tore his tunic and cloak and he pulled hair from his head and beard in grief. Those who loved and feared the Lord gathered round Ezra. Ezra sat astonished about this disobedience until the time of the evening sacrifice.



Hold up picture:

Then Ezra fell on his knees with his arms outstretched to God and prayed. Ezra told God how ashamed he was of the sins of his people. As a result of their disobedience they had become captives in Babylon, but God had shown kindness in allowing them to return to their land. Now they were guilty of marrying people who worshipped idols again. Ezra pleaded with God not to destroy them all.

Discuss:

The Israelites had spent 70 years in captivity for worshipping idols, God had allowed them to return, and they've slipped right back into sin again. So you have a sin that you struggle with over and over?
(maybe lying or anger towards a sibling)



Hold up picture:

While Ezra was praying, confessing, weeping and bowing down before the Temple, a large crowd of Jews gathered round him and wept bitterly. One of them, Shechaniah, said, “We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women who do not worship the Lord. Let us promise to send these women and their children away according to God’s Law.”



Hold up picture:

Ezra rose up and put the priests, the Levites, and all the people under oath to do what had been suggested. An order was given for all the exiled men who had returned to gather in Jerusalem in three days or have their property confiscated (taken away).



Hold up picture:

Three days later the men of Judah gathered in the square before the Temple. It was raining heavily and they were trembling. Ezra told them, “You have been unfaithful and you have married foreign women. It’s time to honor God and obey Him. Separate yourselves from the idol worshipping people around you and from your foreign wives.”



Hold up picture:

They responded, “You are right! We must do as you say but we need time to sort this out and put our lives right with God for there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter and it is the season of heavy rains.” Those who had married foreign women agreed to appear before the elders and judges of the towns where they lived for their cases to be heard. Only a few people opposed doing this.

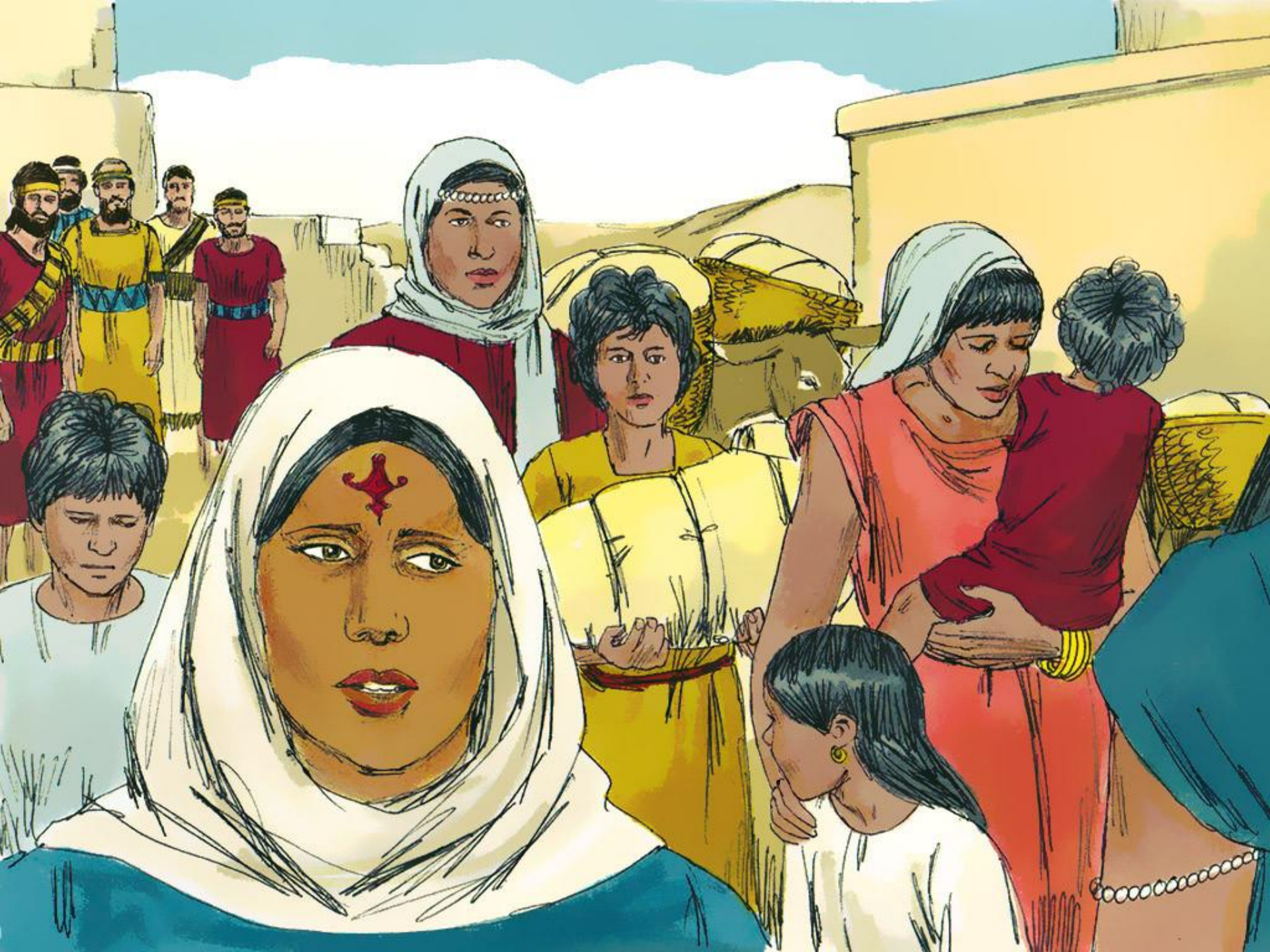
Explain:

The people faced two problems: 1) There were too many of them for the all the improper marriages to be settled in just a few days...2) The weather would not allow them all to stay in Jerusalem. The ones who had traveled a long way would have to camp outside in the cold and rain. So they requested to go back to their towns and settle the matter of their improper marriages with the judges and elders of their towns.



Hold up picture:

Ezra selected men who were heads of the family. On the first day of the tenth month they sat down to investigate the cases. By the first day of the first month each case had been heard (112 cases in 3 months).



Hold up picture:

The men with idol-worshipping wives made agreements to separate from them and any children and they gave offerings to God for their sins. Among those who had disobeyed God in this way were priests and Levites, musicians and Temple servants.

Explain / Ask:

Did it surprise you that some of the priests, Levites, and Temple servants had married foreign women? *(answers might vary)* Those would be the ones that should have known better, but sometimes even our church leaders can sin. We can all fall short of God's Word and that's why we all need to study the Bible and look out for each other.

The Israelites repented when their sin was pointed out. What does it mean to "repent"? *(answers might vary)* Repenting should involve a change. It means to **STOP** sinning, **TURN** away from the sin and back to God, and to **GO** obey God.