

## Lesson 115

# Ezra Teaches the Law

Ezra and the Jews wept over their sin and repented.

# Studying God's Word

Don't forget! Review the Optional Supplements and determine where you can use them.

## Introduction

Have supplies for the object lesson ready.

We can see from the Bible and our own lives that sin has consequences. We've seen examples from the Bible where God had to punish sin.

What are some of those examples? Allow discussion. Mention examples such as God sending Adam and Eve out of the garden; God sending the flood; God confusing the languages of the people at Babel; God sending enemies against the Israelites when they sinned; God judging evil kings of Israel and Judah.

The wisest king of Israel broke God's law by marrying many foreign women who worshipped false gods. Soon, he turned away from the Lord to worship idols, too. What was his name? King Solomon.

Does anyone remember the consequences of his sin? What punishment did God give King Solomon? Solomon's kingdom would be divided and given to his servant.

Refer to the Exodus to Malachi Timeline. God's judgment came to pass during the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam. When Rehoboam became king, 10 tribes of Israel rebelled against him and chose a different man, Jeroboam, to be their king. This was the beginning of the divided kingdom. Refer to #24 on the timeline.

To help us see the effects of sin, let's do an experiment. Bring out the object lesson supplies. You may have the students gather around to see and help. Pour milk onto the plate until it's about halfway full.

God called his people, the Jews, to be separate from the people and nations around them. Let's use some food coloring to represent the Jewish people. Have students drip food coloring into the milk to create several patches of colors on the surface. Do not stir the food coloring in. It may take a few drops in each spot to create a good patch of color.

God gave them special laws to govern how they were to worship him and treat each other. They were not to worship false gods, or idols, or marry people who did not follow God. When they disobeyed these laws, they not only broke God's commands, but they also influenced others to do the same. Direct several students to take a cotton swab and dip the tip into the dish soap. One by one, have them touch the tip of their swab into a colored patch in the milk. Pause to watch the color spread out from each cotton swab until the colors are mixed and swirled together.

The more the people sinned, the more they looked and acted like the pagan nations around them. Their actions affected their families and

communities. And this is what we'll see happening with the Jewish exiles who returned to Judah. Have helpers throw away the cotton swabs and all the students return to their seats.

Refer to the Exodus to Malachi Timeline. Remember that God told the Jews they would be captives in Babylon for 70 years. But he promised that they would return to their land.

### Slide #3

Refer to Lesson 113 Theme Poster. And they did return. During this time, the land of Babylon was taken over by Persia. God used Cyrus, the king of Persia, to send the captives back to Judah under the leadership of Zerubbabel. And the people began to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

Today we will read about a second group of Jews returning home. This time the priest Ezra would lead them back. Let's see what the Bible has to say about Ezra and this group of Jews.

## **The Return of Ezra**

Refer to the Books of the Bible Poster. Turn to Ezra 7. The book of Ezra is right after Kings and Chronicles. It's about a third of the way from the beginning of the Bible.

### Slide #4

### Slide #5

### Slide #6

Ezra 7:6–10

We will read Ezra 7:6–10. Choose readers.

Ezra was a priest and a descendant of the high priest Aaron, Moses' brother. What else does verse 6 say he was? A scribe skilled in the Law of Moses.

A scribe was someone who read and copied the Hebrew scriptures, so Ezra knew the Law of Moses really well.

Refer to the Books of the Bible Poster. What are the books of the law in the Old Testament? Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Where did Ezra come up from? It's where the captives from Judah were living. Babylonia (Babylon).

Remember Babylon was part of Persia now. Which king of Persia gave Ezra permission to go home? King Artaxerxes.

And whose hand was upon Ezra? The Lord his God.

God would use Ezra to lead the Jews back to Judah. Who went with Ezra? Some of the people of Israel, priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants.

Remember, Zerubbabel had led some of the Jews back to Judah already. And now Ezra began his journey to lead more of the Jews back home with the king's permission.

Pass out the Class Notes.

Ezra 7:10 tells us something about Ezra. There were three things that Ezra had set his heart to do. What were they? To study the Law of the Lord, to do it, and to teach it in Israel.

Slide #7

Let's start the Class Notes. Which word will you circle to complete #1 about Ezra? Choose a reader. Priest. Have students complete #1.

Ezra was a man of God. He desired to know and to obey God's Word and to teach others. He had a journey of over 1,000 miles ahead of him. And before he started, he led a time of fasting and praying to ask God for protection on their journey.

Slide #8

Slide #9

Ezra 8:31

Turn to Ezra 8:31. Let's read that. Assign a reader.

Where were Ezra and the Jews headed? Jerusalem. Jerusalem was more than 1,000 miles away. And whose hand was upon them as they traveled? The hand of God.

God had promised that the people would one day return to Jerusalem. And God was keeping his promise.

Who will read #2 on the Class Notes and give the answer? Choose a reader. Jerusalem. Have students complete #2. Refer to the Attributes of God Poster. Which attribute means that God will always keep his promises? Faithful.

God was showing his faithfulness to his people. Some people had returned with Zerubbabel. And now more of the Jews were returning under the leadership of Ezra the priest.

Because God's hand was upon them, what did God deliver them from? The hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way. What is an ambush? Allow answers.

An ambush is a surprise attack by enemies, like thieves, who would hide along the road then jump out and attack. Ezra and his people were bringing many goods and treasures with them back to Jerusalem. They probably made a tempting target for thieves, but God protected them.

## **The Reaction of Ezra**

When Ezra finally arrived in Jerusalem, it didn't take him long to see that God's people were not following the Law of the Lord. They had forgotten God's laws in the years since they returned with Zerubbabel, and they were disobeying God.

Slide #10

Slide #11

Slide #12

## Ezra 9:1–3

Turn to Ezra 9:1–3. Listen carefully and tell me what the people had done. Read the verses or assign a reader.

What was going on? What sin had the people committed? Allow discussion. The Jews were marrying people from the nations around them.

Slide #13

Show the Lesson Theme Poster. Ezra saw that the Jewish people—even the officials and leaders—were marrying women and men from the foreign nations around them. God had commanded them NOT to do this very thing. The people from these nations did not worship the true God. They were pagans and worshipped idols and led the Jews to do the same. God wanted the Jewish people to marry only those who loved and worshipped him. Look in Ezra 9:3. What did Ezra do? He tore his garment and cloak and pulled out some of the hair on his head and beard and sat appalled.

This may seem like a strange way to react. But it was common in those days for the priest to show how upset he was by tearing his clothes and pulling his hair out.

What does it mean that Ezra sat appalled? Allow discussion.

Appalled means shocked or dismayed. Ezra couldn't believe that the Jews would disobey God in such a terrible way so soon after coming back to Judah.

Slide #14

Who will read #3 on the Class Notes about the sin the exiles committed? Choose a reader. Marrying foreign people. Have students complete #3. And #4, who will read about Ezra's reaction? Choose a reader. Clothing. Have students complete #4.

Slide #15Slide #16

## Ezra 9:5–6

Let's see what Ezra did next in chapter 9, verses 5–6. Who will read those verses? Choose a reader.

What did Ezra do after the evening sacrifice? He fell on his knees and spread out his hands to the Lord. He was praying.

What did Ezra say in his prayer? He was ashamed and embarrassed (blushing) to lift up his face to God.

Why was Ezra so ashamed before God? Because of the iniquities (sin) and guilt of the people.

Ezra returned to Jerusalem only to find the people sinning against God. They were marrying pagan people from other nations. They were like the colors all mixed up in the milk in our experiment. They were not obeying the Law of the Lord or teaching it to their children. God had commanded the people to marry only those who believed that he was God—the ONLY God.

How did Ezra know that God had commanded them not to marry people of other nations? Allow answers. It was in the laws God gave to Moses.

Refer to the Books of the Bible Poster. Remember, Ezra studied the Law of God. That's the first five books of the Bible.

### Slide #17

Deuteronomy 7:3–4

Turn to one of those books, Deuteronomy, and we'll read what God commanded the Israelites in chapter 7, verses 3–4. Read the verses or choose a reader.

It's clear that God didn't want his people giving their sons or daughters in marriage to the other people living in the land of Canaan.

What did God warn would happen if they disobeyed? The foreign spouses will turn away the Israelites from following God to serve other gods.

This is what was happening with the Jewish exiles. Instead of teaching the foreign people about the true God, they were turning away from him because of their foreign husbands and wives.

### Slide #18

Which word will you circle for #5 on the Class Notes? Choose a reader. Ashamed. Have students complete #5.

Who will read #6 about God's command? Choose a reader. Other gods. Have students complete #6.

Ezra had come to Jerusalem prepared to teach the people God's laws. But since he found out the Jews were marrying people who worshipped idols and not the one true God, what would he do?

## **The Response of the People**

Turn to Ezra 10 to see what happened next.

### Slide #19

### Slide #20

### Slide #21

### Slide #22

Ezra 10:1–3

Who will read verse 1? Choose a reader.

What was Ezra doing? Praying, confessing, weeping, casting himself down before God.

And at the end of verse 1, who came to Ezra while he was praying? Men, women, and children.

What were these people doing? They were weeping bitterly.

What will you circle for #7 in the Class Notes? Weeping bitterly. Have students complete #7.

Listen to verses 2 and 3 now. Read the verses.

Why were the people weeping? The man Shecaniah explained it. They had broken faith (sinned) against God by marrying foreign women.

In Ezra 10:3, what were the people willing to do with the foreign wives they had taken? Make a covenant (promise) to God to put away their foreign wives and children.

Shecaniah spoke for the people, saying that they recognized the great sin they had committed against God by marrying foreign people. But, they promised to make it right. All the Jews gathered in Jerusalem within three days to deal with this sin. On the day they met outside of the temple, it was pouring rain. The people were trembling because of the rain and also because of their sin.

Slide #23

Slide #24

Ezra 10:10–11

Then Ezra addressed the people. Someone read Ezra 10:10–11. Assign readers.

What three things did Ezra tell the people to do in verse 11? Make confession to the Lord. Do the Lord's will. Separate themselves from the people of the land and the foreign wives.

Show the Lesson Theme Poster. Ezra taught the people God's commands so that they understood they had disobeyed God. They confessed their sins and agreed to turn back to God. They were sorry for what they had done. When the Jews married foreign wives, they were disobeying God's law. The pagan wives did not love and worship God alone, and they were leading their husbands and children to worship false gods. When Ezra pointed out their sin, the people returned in humble sorrow to God and asked for forgiveness. They admitted their sin and agreed to separate themselves from the pagans in the land. They turned back to the one true God.

Remember how the colors looked all mixed up in the milk in our experiment? Would it be easy to return the colors to how they started when they were dropped in the milk? No.

This problem with the Jewish exiles took about three months to fix. The foreign wives and children were sent away, and the people offered sacrifices to God for their sin to show their repentance.

Slide #25

Let's finish the Class Notes. Who will read #8 and give the answer? Choose a reader. Their foreign wives and children. Have students complete #8.

## Application

Ezra was a faithful priest of God. He wanted to study, obey, and teach the Law of the Lord to the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem. When Ezra and the second group of Jews arrived in Jerusalem, they found out that those who had returned earlier had been marrying foreign people who worshipped false gods.

Slide #26

Refer to the Lesson Theme Poster. Ezra prayed and asked for God's forgiveness and mercy. When the Jews heard his cry to God, they were convicted of their sinfulness and repented of their sin. Their grief led to repentance and turning away from sin. There is a New Testament verse about that.

### Slide #27

2 Corinthians 7:10

Listen to 2 Corinthians 7:10. Read the verse.

What does godly grief produce? Repentance that leads to salvation without regret.

Why is salvation without regret? Allow discussion. Because we receive complete forgiveness from God.

When sorrow over sin leads us to confess our sins to Jesus and trust in him for salvation, we are free from the burden of sin. God gives us peace in place of our guilt. But the grief and sorrow that unbelievers feel over sin leads to death rather than eternal life.

As great a priest as Ezra was, he could only point people to God's Word and call them to repent. Jesus also came to serve as a priest among God's people, calling them back to obedience. But Jesus is our perfect high priest who has paid the penalty for our sin. Just as Ezra cried out to God for mercy, we can do the same and receive forgiveness because of what Jesus has done for us. We may still have consequences on earth for our sins, as the Israelites faced, but our relationship with God is restored.

Is there a sin that you're continuing to do when you know it's against God's Word? It may be lying or disobeying or putting other things in your life before God. When God shows us our sin, we must confess it, make it right, and separate ourselves from that sin—even if it costs us a lot. As God's children, we are called to be in the world but not of the world. And we have been given the Holy Spirit to help us obey God's will and be different from the world!

## **Lesson Review**

We all learn best with review and repetition! We encourage you to play a lesson review game.

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