

## Lesson 115

# Ezra Teaches the Law

Ezra and the Jews wept over their sin and repented.

# Overview

## Lesson Focus

The second wave of Jews returned to Jerusalem led by Ezra the priest. When he arrived, Ezra discovered that many of the people had again fallen into sin and married pagan wives who had brought idol worship with them. Greatly grieved, Ezra cried out to God. The people were convicted and repented, determined to obey God and separate themselves from their foreign family members.

## Key Passages

Deuteronomy 7:3–4; Ezra 7:6–10, 8:31, 9:1–3, 9:5–6, 10:1–3, 10:10–11;  
2 Corinthians 7:10

## Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe Ezra's role in teaching the law.
- Describe the people's repentance.

## Memory Verse

1 Peter 5:10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

## Prepare to Share

### Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

After the 70 years of captivity were completed, God stirred the heart of King Cyrus to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1). Under the leadership of Zerubbabel and encouragement from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the first phase of the return from exile was completed in 515 BC as the temple was completed (Ezra 6). The second return was led by Ezra almost 50 years later in 467 during the reign of the Persian King Artaxerxes (Ezra 7). The third return was led by Nehemiah, and we will talk about that in the next lesson.

Ezra, who is presumed to be the author of this book, traced his lineage back to Aaron to establish his proper claim to the priesthood of God (Ezra 7:1–5). While in Babylon, Ezra had been trained as a scribe in the Law of Moses and set his heart to do and teach the law in Israel. As with the first return, God directed the king to send Ezra back to Jerusalem. The king also sent a letter of passage and

commanded that money be provided from the king's treasury and from the provinces around Israel. Ezra was also to set up a government and to teach the people of the land to rightly worship God. As all this unfolded, Ezra recognized God's hand directing all of these events and offered him praise for his goodness (Ezra 7:27–28).

After gathering all those who desired to return, Ezra and the whole group fasted and prayed for God's protection, then they traveled to Israel with the gold, silver, and other precious things to beautify the temple (Ezra 8:1–30). As they journeyed about 1,000 miles to Jerusalem, God protected them along the way. The riches were recorded at the temple, and sacrifices were offered for the sins of the nation before God. But Ezra was about to uncover more sin that would need to be dealt with.

Ezra learned that many of the people and leaders, even the priests, had been intermarrying with the pagan nations. This is something that was expressly forbidden by God when he delivered instructions to the Israelites in preparation for them to enter the promised land (Deuteronomy 7:1–5). As Ezra realized how far away the Israelites were from worshipping God rightly and obeying his commands, he was grieved (Ezra 9:1–4). Ezra poured out his heart to God and acknowledged the sins of the people.

As Ezra was praying in front of the temple, people gathered around him and recognized that they had sinned. God convicted them through Ezra's words, and they wept bitterly (Ezra 10:1–2). One man, Shecaniah, spoke up on behalf of the people and acknowledged their sin. But there was hope! He knew that if they repented and turned back to following God's law, they could be restored to a right relationship with their Creator.

The responsibility of teaching truth and asking God to cleanse Israel from its sin fell on Ezra. The leaders were assembled from around the region, and Ezra taught them the truth about their pagan wives. In response, there was mass repentance, and arrangements were made to purify Israel and to dissolve the pagan marriages. In all, the process took three months.

What brought about the change in the people of Israel? Prior to Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem, the other leaders had neglected to teach the people the truth of God's Word. Ezra reversed that situation and called people to do what was right in the eyes of God. God uses people to bring about his plans in the world. It was through the faithfulness of Ezra and his desire to see God's law taught and obeyed that God brought repentance to the Jews in and around Jerusalem.

As a Christian, you have that same opportunity to proclaim the truths of God's Word. Proclaiming the truths of God's Word can lead unbelievers to understand their sin and need for a Savior. Proclaiming the truths of God's Word can lead believers to a deeper relationship with Jesus as they recognize how much they have been forgiven and how the Holy Spirit enables them to live lives of obedience and joy.

## Historical/Apologetics Background

A very interesting feature of the book of Ezra is the detail in the lists. Chapter 8 includes an extensive list of the heads of the households and the number of those who accompanied Ezra. If this were a story that someone had made up, we would not expect to see such detail. These details are confirmation of the truthfulness of Scripture and should assure us that God has given us a trustworthy set of writings in the Bible.

When God chose Israel as a special nation for his own purposes, he also set them apart from the nations that surrounded them and those that they were to drive out of the promised land (Deuteronomy 7:6–8). God had forbidden them to intermarry with the pagan nations because he knew that they would be led astray to worship idols (Deuteronomy 7:1–5). This is exactly what happened many times throughout Israel’s history. Even leaders like King Solomon were led away by their pagan wives to worship idols (1 Kings 11). As Ezra returned to Jerusalem after the exile, he found that the people and their leaders of Israel had married wives from the surrounding nations.

Since Christ had not yet come to bear the sins of the world, the sins of the Israelites still had to be covered by sacrifices offered at the temple. The rebuilt temple had been functioning for nearly 50 years, and the priests offered sacrifices for themselves and the people (Ezra 10:19). While it was necessary for these priests to offer sacrifices for their own sin, they were awaiting the Messiah who would come and offer a perfect sacrifice once for all (Hebrews 7:26–28).

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