

## 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 learned that sin has consequences. We've seen examples from the Bible where God had to punish sin.

Refer to the Exodus to Malachi Timeline for ideas. 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 #24 on the timeline. God's judgment came 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.

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 commanded his people, the Jews, to be separate from the people of the 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 for how they were to worship him and treat each other. They were not to worship false gods, or idols, or to marry people who worshipped false gods. When the people disobeyed these laws, they not only broke God's commands, but they also influenced others to do the same wrong things. 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 with each cotton swab.

The more the people sinned, the more they looked and acted like the nations around them. Their actions affected their families and communities. And this is what we'll see happening with the Jewish people 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 exiled, or taken away, to Babylon as captives 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 known as Persia. God used Cyrus, the king of Persia, to send many of the exiles, the Jewish people, back to Judah led by Zerubbabel.

What did the people rebuild in Jerusalem? The temple.

Today we will read about a second group of Jews returning home. This time a priest named 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. We will read from the book of Ezra. It's right after Kings and Chronicles.

### Slide #4

### Slide #5

### Slide #6

Ezra 7:6–10

We will start with Ezra 7:6 to find out a bit about Ezra. Choose a reader.

We're told Ezra was a priest, but what other job does this verse mention? He was a what? A scribe.

A scribe was someone who read and wrote copies of the books of the law. So Ezra was skilled in the Law of Moses and knew it very well.

Refer to the Books of the Bible Poster. Which books in the Old Testament are books of the law? Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Let's read about the group of people who went back to Jerusalem with Ezra. Who would like to read verses 7–10? Choose readers.

Where did Ezra come up from? It's where the captives from Judah were living. Babylonia (Babylon).

Remember Babylon was called 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 some of the Jews back to Judah. Who went with Ezra? Some of the people of Israel, priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants.

Jerusalem was more than 1,000 miles away. How long did the journey take? Look in verse 9. Four months.

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.

Ezra was a man of God. He desired to know and to obey God's Word and to teach it to others. He had a journey of over 1,000 miles ahead of him, but Ezra was ready. God had promised that the people would one day return to Jerusalem. And he was keeping his promise.

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 of them had gone home with Zerubbabel. And now another group of Jews was going home under the leadership of Ezra the priest.

They prayed for safety on the journey, and God's hand was upon them to keep them safe from enemy attack and ambushes.

What is an ambush? Allow answers.

### Slide #7

An ambush is a surprise attack by enemies, like thieves, who would hide along the road then jump out and attack. Ezra's group was bringing many nice things, including silver and gold treasures, with them. They probably made a tempting target for thieves, but God protected them and brought them safely to Jerusalem.

Pass out the Class Notes to the students.

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

Who will read #2 on the Class Notes and give the answer? Choose a reader. Jerusalem. Have students complete #2.

## **The Reaction of Ezra**

When Ezra arrived, it didn't take him long to see that the people who had returned with Zerubbabel earlier were not following the Law of the Lord. It had been several years since they had come home, and they had forgotten God's laws and were disobeying God.

Ezra saw that the Jewish people—even the officials and leaders—were marrying women and men from the foreign nations around them. But God had commanded them NOT to do this very thing.

Why do you think God would give this command? Allow discussion.

The people from these other nations did not worship the true God. They were pagans, which means they worshipped false gods and idols.

Did God want his people to worship false gods? No!

We were reminded earlier how King Solomon did the same thing. When he married foreign women, they led him to worship false gods, and that caused a huge problem, didn't it? God wanted his people to marry only those who loved and worshipped him. But now, they were doing exactly what he said NOT to do.

**Ezra 9:3****Slide #8**

Turn to Ezra 9:3. As I read, follow along to find out what Ezra did when he heard what the people were doing. Read the verse.

What did Ezra do to his clothes? He tore his garment and cloak.  
What did Ezra do to his hair? He pulled out some of the hair on his head and beard.

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. Ouch!

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

Appalled means shocked or sickened. Ezra couldn't believe what he was hearing! How could the Jews disobey God this way so soon after coming back from captivity? Had they already forgotten that their sins were the reason God had sent them to Babylon in the first place?

**Slide #9**

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

**Slide #10****Slide #11****Slide #12****Ezra 9:5–6**

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

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

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

Ezra felt ashamed before God because the people were guilty of many iniquities, or sins.

Refer to the Lesson Theme Poster. Ezra was very sad. He came home to Jerusalem only to find the people sinning against God again. They were marrying people from other nations who worshipped false gods. Like the colors in our experiment, the Jews were mixing with these foreign people, and soon not only did husbands and wives start worshipping idols together, but they were also teaching these things to their children.

God had commanded his people to marry only those who believed that he was the one true God—so that this kind of thing wouldn't happen.

**Slide #13**

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

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

## **The Response of the People**

So 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, the first five books of the Bible. He had come to Jerusalem ready to teach the people what God's Law commanded. But since he found out the Jews were marrying people who worshipped idols, what would he do now? Turn to Ezra 10 to find out.

Slide #14

Slide #15

Slide #16

Ezra 10:1–2

Who will read verse 1? Choose a reader.

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

And at the end of verse 1, who gathered where Ezra was praying? Men, women, and children.

What were these people doing? They were weeping bitterly.

Listen to verse 2 now. Read the verse.

Why were the people weeping? They had broken what with God? They had broken faith with God.

How did they break faith with God? By sinning; marrying foreign women.

What was there for Israel in spite of this sin? Look at the last part of verse 2. There was hope.

The people were sorry for their sin but knew there was still hope for them if they turned from their sin and made things right with God. They promised to do the right thing and gathered in Jerusalem to deal with this sin.

Show the Lesson Theme Poster. On the day they met outside of the temple, it was pouring rain. The people were trembling because of the rain—and because of their sin. Ezra reminded the people of God's commands. When the Jews married foreign wives, they were disobeying God's Law. These wives did not love and worship God, and they were leading their husbands and children to worship false gods. When Ezra pointed out their disobedience, the people realized they had sinned. They turned to God in humble sorrow and asked for forgiveness.

Remember how the colors got all mixed up in our experiment? Would it be easy to separate the colors again to show how they looked when they were first dropped in the milk? No.

This problem was mixed up, too. It took about three months to fix it. The foreign wives and children were sent away, and the people offered sacrifices to God to show their repentance.

#### Slide #17

Let's finish the Class Notes. What will you circle for #7 in the Class Notes? Wept bitterly. Have students complete #7.

Who will read #8 and give the answer? Choose a reader. 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 #18

Refer to the Lesson Theme Poster. Ezra prayed and asked for God's forgiveness and mercy. When the Jews heard Ezra's cry to God, they understood their sinfulness and repented of their sin. They were very sorry for what they had done, and they knew they should turn away from their sin and make things right. There is a New Testament verse about that.

Second Corinthians 7:10 says that it's a good thing when we are so sorry for our sins that it causes us to confess them to Jesus and trust in him to save us. When we admit our sins and trust in Jesus, God gives us peace and eternal life. But those who will not turn to Jesus and confess their sins will not have eternal life.

Jesus is our perfect high priest who has paid the penalty for our sin. Just as Ezra cried out to God for mercy and forgiveness, we can do the same because of what Jesus has done for us. We may still have consequences for our sins, as the Israelites did when they had to send their wives and children away, but our relationship with God will be made right.

Is there a sin that you find yourself doing 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, who trust Jesus as Savior, we are to be in the world but not to act like the world. It can be easy to get mixed in—like the food coloring in the milk—by doing sinful things. But we have been given the Holy Spirit to help us obey God and be different from the world around us!

### **Lesson Review**

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

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