



8

Restoring God's Law

Key Theme

- God uses people to accomplish His perfect plans.

Key Passages

- Ezra 7:6–10, 8:31, 9:1–3, 9:5–6, 10:1–3, 10:10–11

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe Ezra's role.
- Describe the people's repentance.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

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Students will practice the memory verse by working on a crossword puzzle and reciting the verse to a friend.



Activity 1: Restoring God's Law Class Notes

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Students will fill out the Restoring God's Law Class Notes as you study the lesson.



Studying God's Word

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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 were marrying pagan wives who had brought idol worship with them. Greatly grieved, Ezra cried out to God. The people were convicted of their sins and repented, determined to obey God. Worship of God was restored.



Activity 2: Ezra and the People's Repentance

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Students will present a simple drama that reviews the lesson.

Lesson Preparation

WHAT YOU WILL DO

WHAT YOU WILL NEED



COME ON IN

- ☐ Print one Memory Verse Review Sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.

- ☐ Memory Verse Poster
- ☐ Memory Verse Review Sheet for each student



RESTORING GOD'S LAW CLASS NOTES

- ☐ Print one Restoring God's Law Class Notes from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student. Keep the answer key for your use.

- ☐ Restoring God's Law Class Notes for each student
- ☐ Restoring God's Law Class Notes Answer Key
- ☐ Pencils



STUDYING GOD'S WORD

- ☐ Study the Prepare to Share section.
- ☐ Go Before the Throne.

- ☐ Student Take Home Sheets
- ☐ Quarter 3, Lesson 12 Theme Poster
- ☐ Quarter 4, Lesson 5 Theme Poster



EZRA AND THE PEOPLE'S REPENTANCE

- ☐ Print six Ezra and the People's Repentance Scripts from the Resource DVD-ROM.

- ☐ Six Ezra and the People's Repentance Scripts
- ☐ Optional props: head covering, belt, robe for Ezra
- ☐ Quarter 3, Lessons 4, 11, and 12 Theme Posters



Memory Verse

Nehemiah 9:6 You alone are the Lord; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them. And You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You.

► **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the lesson key passages 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, traces 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 prepared 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 (7:27–28).

After gathering all those who desired to return, Ezra and the whole group fasted and prayed for God's protection as 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 way back 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, through the

truth of his words, that they had sinned. God convicted them through Ezra's words, and they wept bitterly (10:1–2). One man, Shechaniah, 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 begin purifying Israel and dissolve the pagan marriages. In all, the process took three months. In response to their sin, they offered sacrifices to God to cover their sin.

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 teacher, parent, or friend, you have that same opportunity to proclaim the truths of God's Word. You have the opportunity to influence many people. 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, recognizing how much they have been forgiven. As an ambassador representing the King of kings, proclaim His truths so that others can know Him more fully.

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, that was the condition of the leaders of Israel—they 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).



BEFORE THE THRONE

Holy Lord, I give you praise for who you are—God almighty, the most high God, everlasting God. Humbly, I ask you to reveal any area in my own life that may be overshadowing you. Do I harbor any idols? Have I chosen pleasure over obedience and sacrifice this week? I do not want to study a lesson like this one and walk away unchanged. You know, I’m tempted to judge the Jews for their repeated disobedience. I may think I could never be like that. But I would be lying. My heart is deceitful and wicked. Holy Spirit give me the strength to overcome the daily temptation to give in to my heart’s desires. Instead fill me with a longing to please you and obey your Word without compromise. Help me teach this lesson in such a way that my students also feel the urgency and necessity of living a life of faithfulness, service, and obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit.



COME ON IN

As students arrive . . .

- They will complete the Memory Verse Review Sheet. If time allows, have the students recite the verse together, to each other, or to you.

This time at the beginning of class should be used to review the memory verse. We have provided an activity sheet on the Resource DVD-ROM for you to use. You may have other ideas and ways to encourage your students to memorize the verse.



After all the students arrive, pray with them before beginning the lesson.



REVIEW

Using the Lesson Theme Posters provided with each lesson, quickly review the previous lesson(s) with your students. Take 5 to 10 minutes to reinforce the important truths the students have heard so far in your class.

Ask the children questions about the previous lessons as you display the Lesson Theme Posters. Reflect briefly on the passages you read, bringing the objectives and themes back into focus. This will refresh the truths in your students' minds and maintain continuity as you teach through the lessons.



Restoring God's Law Class Notes

MATERIALS

- ☐ Restoring God's Law Class Notes for each student
- ☐ Restoring God's Law Class Notes Answer Key
- ☐ Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

Print the class notes for each student. Pass them out at the beginning of class. Have students fill in the blanks as you study the lesson.

We will complete the class notes as we study the Bible passages. Do not work ahead. I'll let you know when to fill something in.

After completing each point on the class notes, have the students re-read the statement together or call on individual students to read it.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

As we complete the class notes today, we will learn that when Ezra returned to Jerusalem, the people who had returned earlier with Zerubbabel had again turned away from God and turned to the false gods and idols of the foreigners and pagans they had married.



Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

Refer to the History of Israel Poster and Quarter 3, Lesson 12 Theme Poster as you introduce this lesson. The Jews had been captive in Babylon for 70 years. God had promised that they would return to their land of Judah. Refer to Quarter 4, Lesson 5 Theme Poster. And they did return. God used the king of Persia, King Cyrus, to send the captives back to Judah. King Cyrus sent the people

► Use the History of Israel Poster included with your teacher kit to show your class where the biblical accounts you study chronologically fit into this timeline.

back under the leadership of Zerubbabel. And the people began to rebuild the temple. But there were still Jews in the land of Babylon, which during this time was known as Persia.

Today we will read about a second group of Jews returning home. Again, God moved in the heart of the pagan king of Persia, King Artaxerxes, to allow the Jews to go back home to Judah. 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 headed for home according to God's promise and plan.

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. We will read Ezra 7:6–10 *Choose students to read the verses aloud.*

Ezra 7:6–10

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text.

- ? First of all, where did Ezra come up from? It's in verse 6. *Ezra 7:6. Babylon.*
- ? And whose hand was upon Ezra? *Ezra 7:6. The Lord his God.*
- ? Yes, the Lord's hand was on him. And God would use Ezra to lead the Jews back to Judah. Who went with Ezra? *Ezra 7:7. Some of the children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers.*

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 according to God's promise to them.

- ? Ezra 7:10 tells us something about Ezra. There were three things that Ezra had prepared his heart to do. What were they? *Ezra 7:10. To seek the Law of the Lord, to do it, to teach it in Israel.*
- ? Based on Ezra 7:10 how will you complete #1 on your class notes? Will someone read that for us? *Assign a reader. Seek, do, teach.*

Ezra was a man of God. He desired to do God's Word. He had a journey of over 1,000 miles ahead of him. And before he started off, he led a time of fasting and praying to ask God for His protection on their journey. Turn to Ezra 8:31. Let's read that. *Choose a student to read Ezra 8:31.*

Ezra 8:31

- ? Where were they headed? *Ezra 8:31. Jerusalem.*
- ? Yes. Headed to Jerusalem more than 1,000 miles away. And whose hand was upon them as they traveled? *Ezra 8:31. The hand of God.*
- ? And what did God deliver them from? *Ezra 8:31. The hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road.*
- ? Will someone read #2 on your class notes? How will you complete that? *Assign a reader. God.*

? And how about #3? Someone read that. *Assign a reader. Enemy.*

Discover the Truth

God had promised that the people would one day return to Jerusalem. And God was keeping His promise. Some people returned with Zerubbabel. And now more of the Jews were returning under the leadership of Ezra the priest. They had received permission to go from the king of Persia, King Artaxerxes. The Lord God's hand was upon them, and God protected the people on their journey. Ezra had prepared his heart and was ready to teach the people the Law of the Lord when he returned to Israel. And the people of Israel needed to hear God's Law.



READ THE WORD

It didn't take Ezra long to see that God's people in Jerusalem were not following the Law of the Lord. The people had forgotten God's Law in the years since they returned with Zerubbabel. They were disobeying God. Listen carefully so you can figure out what they were doing. Turn to Ezra 9:1–3. Listen carefully and tell me what the people had done. *Read the verses aloud or assign readers.*

Ezra 9:1–3

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

What was going on? Let me explain. Ezra saw that the Jewish people—even the leaders and rulers—were marrying women and men from the other nations around them. The people from the other nations did not worship the true God. They were pagans. They worshipped idols. God had commanded them NOT to do this very thing. God wanted the Jewish people to marry only those who believed that He was the one true God.

? Look back to Ezra 9:3. What did Ezra do? *Ezra 9:3. He tore his garment and robe and plucked 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 robe and plucking his hair out. It wasn't strange at all to the people back then.

? Someone read #4 for the class. How will you complete that? *Assign a reader. Robe, hair.*

? What word does the Bible use to describe Ezra's reaction? It is at the very end of Ezra 9:3. *Ezra 9:3. He was astonished!*

Ezra was astonished that the people would turn away from God so soon! And Ezra did something. We'll find out what when we read Ezra 9:5–6. Will someone read that for us? *Assign a reader. Ezra 9:5–6.*

Ezra 9:5–6

- ? What did Ezra do after the evening sacrifice? *Ezra 9:5. He fell on his knees and spread out his hands to the Lord.*
- ? What was he doing? *He was praying to the Lord.*
- ? Can someone read #5 on your class notes? How will you answer that?
Assign a reader. Prayed.
- ? What did Ezra say in his prayer? *Ezra 9:6. He was ashamed and humiliated to lift up his face to God.*
- ? Why was Ezra so ashamed before God? *Ezra 9:6. Because of the sin and guilt that went up before God.*
- ? OK. Will someone read #6 on the class notes and tell us how to complete that? *Assign a reader. Sin, guilt.*

Discover the Truth

Ezra returned to his beloved Jerusalem only to find the people sinning against God. They were marrying people from other nations. They were not obeying the Law of the Lord. They were not obeying the Lord! God had commanded the people to marry only those who believed that He was the Lord God—the ONLY Lord God. Ezra was astonished at the sin he found. He tore his robe and fell before God to confess the sins. Ezra had come to Jerusalem prepared to teach the people what God’s Law commanded. But since he found out the Jews were marrying people who worshipped idols and not the one true God, would he follow through? What would happen? How would the people react to Ezra’s behavior? Let’s find out.



READ THE WORD

Ezra 10:1–3

Let’s read Ezra 10:1–3. *Choose students to read the verses.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? What was Ezra doing in Ezra 10:1? *Ezra 10:1. Praying, confessing, weeping, bowing down before God.*
- ? And at the end of verse 1, who came to Ezra while he was praying? *Ezra 10:1. Men, women, and children came to him.*
- ? What were these people doing? *Ezra 10:1. They were weeping.*

The people came to Ezra while he was praying and weeping. They, too, were weeping before Ezra.

- ? Why were the people weeping? The answer is in Ezra 10:2. The man Shechaniah explained it. *Ezra 10:2. They had trespassed or sinned against God.*
- ? Everyone was weeping and crying. Will someone read #7 on your class notes please? How will you answer that? *Assign a reader. Sin.*
- ? And what had the people done against God? *Ezra 10:2. Taken pagan wives from the other lands.*
- ? And in Ezra 10:3, what were the people willing to do with the foreign wives they had taken? *Ezra 10:3. Put away the pagan wives from the other nations. These were the wives who were worshipping other gods.*

Ezra now addressed the people and told them what they must do!
Someone read Ezra 10:10–11. *Assign a reader.*

Ezra 10:10–11

- ? There are three things in Ezra 10:11 that Ezra told the people to do. Who can tell me one of them? *Make confession to the Lord God.*
- ? And the second thing? *Ezra 10:11. Do the Lord's will.*
- ? And the third thing? *Ezra 10:11. Separate yourself from the people of the land and the pagan wives.*
- ? Now just for review. Who can read #8 on your class notes for us? How will you complete that? *Assign a reader. Confess, Lord's, separate.*

Discover the Truth

The people knew that they had disobeyed God. They confessed their sins and agreed to turn back to God. They were sorry for what they had done. God insists that His people love and serve Him alone! When the Jews married the pagan wives, they were disobeying the one true God. The pagan wives did not love and worship God alone, and many of the Jews were turning to the gods of the pagans and turning away from the true God. When Ezra challenged them and 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.

- ? Will someone read #9 on your class notes? How will you answer that? *Assign a reader. God.*





Ezra and the People's Repentance

MATERIALS

- ☐ Ezra and the People's Repentance Scripts
- ☐ Optional props: head covering, belt, and/or robe for Ezra

INSTRUCTIONS

We are going to be performing a simple drama to review today's lesson. I will need three readers, someone to play Ezra, and someone else to read for God. You should take your parts very seriously as you read—everyone except for Reader #3. Reader #3 is not with it as far as this serious skit goes!

Choose volunteers for the parts and read through the drama. Switch parts around and repeat, if time allows.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Great job, everyone! We just reviewed the lesson. Ezra was so upset when he returned to Jerusalem because the people had turned away from God. But, you see, the people had done that many times before! *Refer to Quarter 3, Lesson 4 Theme Poster.* Do you remember when God sent Assyria to punish Israel? They had turned away from God. They were

worshipping false gods—idols! *Refer to Quarter 3, Lesson 11 Theme Poster.* And then God sent Babylon to conquer Judah. Again, they had turned away from God! And had started to worship false gods—idols!

Ezra loved God and saw the people falling into the same sins again. God didn't want His people to have anything to do with idol worship or false gods. He had made that very clear. *Refer to Quarter 3, Lesson 12 Theme Poster.* Remember, He finally punished them by sending them away from their homes to another land for 70 years. Why? Because they wouldn't obey and worship the one true God. He alone is worthy of our worship! And now Ezra was witnessing the people committing the same sin! Ezra repented for the people and was sorry for their sins against God.

? Ezra prayed for forgiveness before God and the people. What happened when the people heard his prayer? Look at #8 on your class notes if you need a hint. *The people confessed their sins to the Lord, decided to obey God, and separated themselves from their pagan wives.*



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

Ezra was a faithful priest of God. He wanted to seek the Law of the Lord, obey the Law, and teach the Law to the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem. God moved in the heart of King Artaxerxes, and Ezra found himself leaving the pagan nation of Persia and leading a second group of Jews back to their homeland and Jerusalem. When Ezra and the Jews arrived in Jerusalem, they found out that the Jews who had returned earlier with Zerubbabel, even some leaders and priests, had been marrying foreign women who worshipped false gods.

? What was Ezra's reaction when he found out about the people's sin? Look at #4 on your class notes for the answer. *He tore his clothes, plucked out some hair, and fell down in prayer.*

Ezra prayed and asked for God's forgiveness and mercy. The people heard his cry to God. The Jews were convicted of their sinfulness, repented of their sin, turned back to God, and separated themselves from the foreigners and pagans who had convinced them to turn to the false gods—the idols—that they worshipped.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

We have heard over and over in the Old Testament that the people of God allowed others to influence them into idolatry. Idolatry is the worship of false gods or many gods. In today's account, Ezra came back to his beloved Jerusalem only to find that, once again, the people were worshipping false gods. This time they had disobeyed God by marrying pagans—people who did not believe in the one true God. These marriages led the Jews to turn away from God and turn to the false gods of the pagans they had married.

? What can we learn from this today? What is an idol? *Allow discussion. Anything we put in our lives before God.*

? What would an idol be for all of us living today? *Allow discussion. Friends, TV, clothes, video games, sports, appearance, popularity, etc.*

Remember, an idol is anything in our lives that pleases us more than God pleases us. We don't worship and bow down to golden images or statues today. Often our biggest idol today is ourselves, and the pursuit of making ourselves happy. We often think getting more stuff, newer stuff, better stuff will make us happy. We want that stuff more than anything! We have to have the latest video game, clothes, bicycle, phone, gadgets, food—you name it. But all of that stuff we think we need so desperately will get old, worn out, used up, and outdated. You know it's true! And then we'll need more new stuff! That's not how God wants us to live. And it's not how God commands us to live.

God knows that only He can fill our hearts with joy and make us content with the things we have—the things He has blessed us with. That is why God tells us—commands us—to worship only Him. He wants us to love Him with ALL our hearts, all our souls, all our strength, and all our minds.

As we grow and as our lives change, the things we think we need and want so badly will change too. But the Bible tells us that God will never change. His love and His mercy toward us will not change. His promise of heaven through Jesus Christ will not change or get outdated.

God offers something that is far better than all the world has to offer. He offers salvation through Jesus Christ. He offers joy, hope, forgiveness, and assurance of spending eternity with Him in heaven! These things can only come through repentance of our sins and faith in what Jesus did for sinners on the Cross.

➤ Pass out the Student Take Home Sheets and remind the students to practice the memory verse this week.

Knowing Jesus and believing what He has done for sinners—that He died on the Cross, took the punishment for the sins of everyone who would believe, and rose from the grave—promises true joy and contentment. The Bible tells us that the things of the world will pass away and be no more. But those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior, will have eternal life!



MEMORY VERSE

Nehemiah 9:6 You alone are the Lord; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them. And You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

- Praise God because He alone is worthy of our praise and our worship.
- Thank God that He alone can bring true and lasting happiness—there is no substitute!
- Ask God to keep us from loving ourselves and pleasure above Him.