



LESSON 39

God guided Israel to repentance

EZRA 7:1-10:44



God sanctifies His people.



“We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this” (Ezra 10:2).

Supporting Truths

1. God’s people must be holy.
2. The holiness of God’s people depends on the work of God.
3. To be holy, God’s people must confess and turn from their sin.
4. To be holy, God’s people must study, live, and teach God’s word.
5. To be holy, God’s people must depend on God’s mercy.

Objectives

1. Define “holy.”
2. State the phrase that is repeated throughout these chapters.
3. Describe how Ezra and the people demonstrated their sadness over their sin.
4. Describe Ezra and explain what made him the right man for the job.
5. Show how Ezra and the people depended entirely on God’s mercy through prayer.



Lesson Summary

Israel had been in the land for multiple generations, but while the temple had been rebuilt, the people had rebelled. They, like their forefathers, had taken foreign wives, resulting in the worship of foreign gods. So Ezra, eighty years after Cyrus' decree, led a second group to return to Jerusalem. This return, made successful by "the hand of God," led to the repentance of God's people and the restoration of true worship.

Spotlight on the Gospel

In Ezra's return, the LORD providentially guided Israel to repentance and a proper relationship with Him. However, the ultimate display of God's provision to His people is seen in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. God Himself provided Jesus as the spotless lamb. He alone protected Jesus' path to the cross to bear the sin of His people. And it is God Himself that prompts His people to repent and grow in holiness as they hope in Christ.

LAST WEEK



God brought about the restoration of the temple

Ezra 1:1–6:22

THIS WEEK



God guided Israel to repentance

Ezra 7:1–10:44

NEXT WEEK



God led Nehemiah to reconstruct the wall

Nehemiah 1:1–7:73a

RETURN

Lesson Commentary

God sanctifies His people.

In the previous lesson (Ezra 1:1–6:22), God providentially worked through Persian kings and ordinary people to rebuild His temple and restore worship there. But a temple and acts of worship are empty unless they come from a reformed people. There is a gap of over 50 years between Ezra 6 and 7, and during that time the people, following the actions of their leaders, had wandered from wholehearted obedience to God. In Ezra 7–10, God providentially worked to bring His people back into a proper relationship with Him.

God provided for Israel's worship (7:1–28)

First, God providentially raised up the right man to bring the hearts of His people back to Him. Ezra was both qualified and equipped, a priest skilled in the law of Moses (7:1–6). His pattern of preparation is a timeless example to all who study and teach God's word (7:10). Every believer must set His heart on God's word, not only to study it, but also to put it into practice. Only then are we ready to open our mouths and instruct others (Matt 7:5). We must handle God's word with all diligence, teaching the Scriptures with precision and accuracy (2 Tim 2:15), knowing that those who teach others will be judged with greater strictness (Jas 3:1).

In addition to this qualified and equipped leader, God also provided a people to return to Jerusalem with Ezra (Ezra 7:7–10). While the first group to return rebuilt the temple, this second group went back to ensure that

the temple was functioning properly. And like the first group, this second group was successful because it was God who went before them. It was "the hand of the LORD" that gave Ezra and the people success (7:6). This phrase is often repeated (cf. 7:9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31) to emphasize that it was by God's **sovereign** hand that the people were able to return. God showed His

unrivaled power when he moved Artaxerxes, the great leader of the Medo-Persian Empire, to provide for the people's return (7:12–26).

Ezra recognized the LORD's powerful hand at work in the life of Artaxerxes (7:27; cf. Prov 21:1) and in his own life (Ezra 7:28). This gave him courage, so Ezra prepared the leaders of Israel for the journey to Jerusalem (7:28). The **providence** of God greatly encourages believers. Because of God's complete care and control over all creation, Christians need not be anxious about tomorrow (Matt 6:34) or fear great calamity (Rom 6:34). However, God's providence must never be used as an excuse to fail to act in faith. Like Ezra, we must obediently respond to God's leading in our lives, taking courage in God's unbeatable power. In so doing, we follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before us, courageous men and women like Moses (Exod 4:1–9), Joshua (Josh 1:1–9; 5:13–15), Rahab (2:8–14), Daniel (Dan 6:10), and Esther (Esth 4:14).

God protected Ezra on his journey to Jerusalem (8:1–8:36)

The LORD provided for the people's journey in four ways. First, He gathered the people (Ezra 7:28b–8:14). Again, it was because of "the hand of the the LORD" that Ezra was able to assemble the people (7:28b). Second, Yahweh supplied Levites for worship in the temple (8:15–20). The lay people were ready, but no Levites had chosen to return. So Ezra sent men to gather the Levites (8:17). However, it was only "by the good hand of our God on us" that 38 willing Levites were located (8:18–20).

Third, the LORD protected the people (8:21–26). The journey to Jerusalem was dangerous, but Ezra was determined to make it without any help from Artaxerxes' soldiers. He did not want to do anything to confuse the king concerning his trust in God's ability to protect the people on the return to Jerusalem (8:22). So the people, urged on by Ezra, depended on God alone



THINK ABOUT IT

Like Ezra, every believer must know God's word more and more, be what God tells him to be, and teach others also.

THINK ABOUT IT

The world may dismiss what we say, but it often takes note of what we do.



STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

God guided Israel to repentance • Ezra 7:1–10:44



through prayer and fasting (8:21–23). Ezra believed in the sovereignty of God, and his life proved it. God listened to the prayer of His people (8:31–36). As a result, Ezra and those who returned with him were able to aid the people and the house of God (8:35–36). As with all that came before, this divine deliverance came at “the hand of our God” (8:31).

God prompted the people to repent (9:1–10:44)

But Ezra soon heard sad news: just a few generations after the first return to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, the Jews had begun to intermarry with the people in the land (9:1–2). Even the priests and Levites were guilty (9:1). Ezra was devastated by Israel’s unfaithfulness (9:3). Israel was supposed to be a **holy** nation (Exod 19:5–6), pure and set apart to worship God. God had forbidden intermarriage because foreign wives inevitably led Israel to worship foreign gods (Exod 34:10–17; Deut 7, 23). To a great extent this sin had caused Israel’s defeat and exile in the first place. How could they return so quickly to the same sin? Neither the punishment of exile nor the grace of return was enough to keep the people from going back to their fathers’ sin.

In desperation, Ezra threw himself upon the mercy of God (Ezra 9:3–15). He identified himself with his people as he prayed with true humility and utter brokenness over sin. After all, what hope is there for a people who sees God’s grace and still turns away (9:8, 14)? Ezra realized how dead serious sin is, because ultimately all sin despises God’s grace and tramples upon God’s law (9:10). He did not blow it off by thinking, “It’s no big deal, God forgives.” Such presumption is dangerous, because God only forgives the truly broken. Instead Ezra entrusted himself completely—no matter the consequences—to the God who is “just” (Ezra 9:15). This is the only way to grow in holiness, only when we realize the magnitude of our sin and our inability to change ourselves no matter how many chances we’re given. We grow in holiness only when

we cry out for the mercy of God. And this dependence on God’s mercy only deepens as we grow. As we grow in **sanctification**, the process by which God makes us more and more holy, we see more and more God’s great holiness, our great sin, and our desperate need for God’s mercy. Many of the people truly repented. They were broken over their sin (10:1–5) and committed to turn away from their sin (10:6–15). Three months later, in time for the Passover celebration, the Jews had completely separated themselves from the surrounding people (10:16–17). They were ready to worship God. God had created and saved them for this. He had restored them and rebuilt the temple for this. And now He purified them for this. In both their exile and return, God was at work, sovereignly and lovingly drawing the hearts of His people back to Him.

For us, God does the same. By His sovereign grace He saves us, and by His sovereign grace He restores and reforms us over and over again. That is why, whether threatened from without or failing within, we run to Him in prayer as Ezra did, so that we may receive mercy and find grace in every time of need (Heb 4:16). And though we must, like Ezra, work hard to grow in godliness, our hope is in the grace of God at work in us (1 Cor 15:10).

THINK ABOUT IT
Our hope is not
in ourselves, but
in our God who
will complete
His work in us
(Phil 1:6).



Lesson Outline

God sanctifies His people.



AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE

1. God leads His people to worship Him (7:1–28).
2. God leads His people to complete His work (8:1–8:36).
3. God leads His people to repent (9:1–10:44).



AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE

1. God provided for Israel's worship (7:1–28).
 - The LORD provided Ezra as a qualified leader (7:1–6).
 - The LORD provided a people dedicated to His law (7:7–10).
 - The LORD provided Artaxerxes' decree (7:11–28).
2. God protected Ezra on his journey to Jerusalem (8:1–8:36).
 - The LORD gathered the people (7:28b–8:14).
 - The LORD supplied the Levites (8:15–20).
 - The LORD listened to the prayer of His people (8:21–30).
 - The LORD delivered the people and goods safely (8:31–36).
3. God prompted the people to repent (9:1–10:44).
 - Ezra saw the people's sin of intermarriage (9:1–5).
 - Ezra led the people in a confession of sin (9:6–15).
 - The people confessed their sin and reaffirmed God's law (10:1–4).
 - The people separated themselves from their foreign wives (10:5–44).





Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

- 1. What man did God prepare to restore Israel?**
God prepared Ezra, a priest who studied, obeyed, and taught God's law.
- 2. Who helped Ezra to arrive in Jerusalem safely?**
God used King Artaxerxes to help Ezra by granting his requests. Artaxerxes did this because the hand of the LORD was on him.
- 3. What did the people do after Ezra taught them the Law?**
The repented of their sin.
- 4. How did God respond to the people's sin?**
He was merciful.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

- 1. What did the king give Ezra?**
The king gave permission to any Jew who wanted to return to Jerusalem. He also gave silver and gold as an offering to God, money for offerings, and articles for temple service.
- 2. What phrase repeatedly emphasizes that it was God's power that restored His people?**
The hand of our God/the LORD (Ezra 7:9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31).
- 3. Who was missing from the group, and why were they important?**
The Levites. The Levites were the only ones who could assist in temple worship.
- 4. How did Ezra find Levites willing to return?**
Fasting and prayer were acts of utter dependence on God to protect them on the journey.
- 5. Why did the Jews fast and pray?**
God called it "the land which I will show you" Gen. 12:1). This was going to be a special land for Abram and his family.
- 6. How had the people sinned?**
They had married foreign women, which led them to worship foreign gods.
- 7. What did Ezra do at the evening sacrifice?**
Ezra confessed the sins of the people before the Lord. He knew that God had been gracious to the people, but they had sinned against God in return.
- 8. How did Israel demonstrate sorrow over their sin?**
The people confessed their sin and wept bitterly before the Lord. They showed their repentance by divorcing their foreign wives.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



INTRODUCE

PUPPETS

Cut out two eight-inch cardboard circles. Draw a happy face on one and a sad face (with tears) on the other. Glue on yarn for hair, and glue a wooden stick to each. Explain to the children that today's lesson will show God's goodness to Ezra and the Israelites (hold up the happy-face puppet) and also Israel's sin and repentance in the Promised Land (hold up the sad-face puppet).

READ, OBEY, AND TEACH

As the children arrive, pull small groups aside and show them three cards: one should have a picture of the Bible, another should have a picture of hands or feet, and the third should have a picture of lips. Have the children take turns guessing what order the three cards should go in. Then read them Ezra 7:10, which gives the order as: read, obey, and teach. Explain that we cannot teach God's Word until we obey it, and we cannot obey it until we know what it say.



ILLUSTRATE

GOING TO JERUSALEM

Bring in various types of shoes—ballet shoes, snowshoes, hiking boots, tap shoes, cowboy boots, sandals, etc. Discuss what each shoe is for. Ask the children what type of shoes the Israelites might have worn in the hot desert on the way back to Jerusalem. Let the children pretend they are the Israelites hiking through the desert to Jerusalem.

SEPARATE FROM THE BAD

Talk about what it means to separate from something. Give the children various items to separate—uncooked pasta and beans, pennies and nickels, two types of breakfast cereal, beans and rocks, etc. Tell them that beans are good to eat and that you want to separate them from rocks, which are not edible. Sometimes we need to separate from bad things, too. Ask the children what things they should separate from. Talk about children who say bad words, get into trouble, talk back to their parents, are irresponsible with other people's property, etc. Tell the children that in today's lesson the Jews have to separate themselves from people who would lead them away from God.



APPLY

GOD'S GOOD HAND

See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*.

Materials: Craft sheets, scissors, glue.

Directions: Pre-cut the hands and the tabs from the craft sheets. In class, distribute the "God's Good Hand on Ezra and Israel" hand with the corresponding tabs. Have the children glue the tabs on the fingers. Then pass out the "God's Good Hand on Me" hand with corresponding tabs. Have the children glue the tabs on the fingers. Glue the two hands together. Help the students to think of a specific, personal way in which God has blessed them and then write it in the space provided

God's Good Hand
See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

RETURNING TO ITS VOMIT

Sadly, within a few generations of the return to Jerusalem, the Jews began to intermarry with the people in the land (Ezra 9:1–2). It is almost unimaginable that the Jews would so quickly return to the same sin as their forefathers. It was this same sin that contributed to their removal from the promised land in the first place! Illustrate this by bringing in fake vomit or describing vomit to the children. Then ask them how they would feel about covering themselves with it. This is a vivid illustration of just what the Israelites did when they returned to their sin (Prov 26:11).

WALK WITH THE WISE

Tell the children a story about a boy who desired to obey his parents but found obedience increasingly difficult as he spent more time with friends who did not care about obedience. Ask the children why the boy found it hard to obey. Read Proverbs 13:20 and tell the children that in today's lesson the Israelites have chosen for their closest friends—their wives—people who worshiped idols. Ask the children how they think that affected the Israelites' obedience to God.



ILLUSTRATE

DIFFICULT TO REMOVE

It was very difficult and painful for the Jews to separate from their foreign wives. Separating from evil is not easy, but it is necessary. Illustrate this concept by showing the children a barb located on the end of an arrow, thorn, or fish hook. Explain how a barb makes it easy for the tip of the point to enter, but difficult to remove. This is also true of evil: it is easy to join ourselves to evil, but very difficult and painful to remove ourselves from it.

NEED A TISSUE?

The Jews were supposed to be holy, separated from evil. Sadly, many of the men had married foreign women who worshiped idols. Illustrate the concept of holiness by offering a soiled, used, disgusting tissue to someone who has a runny nose. Would any of the children want to use a tissue like this? No! Does God desire His children to be covered with sin and filth? No! God desires us to live in holiness, separated from sin and the corruption of the world.

God's Goodness

See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2



APPLY

GOD'S GOODNESS

See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Craft sheets, yarn, hole punch, glue, tape, and crayons.

Directions: Have children cut out the pyramid template and pyramid pieces from the craft sheets. Color the pyramid pieces and glue them on to the pyramid template. Hole punch two of the tips, feed yarn through, and tie together the ends. Form the template into a pyramid by taping the inside edges together.



AGES 9–11



REPEAT OFFENDER

Explain what it means when someone is labeled a “repeat offender” in the criminal justice system. Talk about how the consequences for people who commit 2nd or 3rd or 4th crimes are typically much greater than those committing their first crime. Tell the children that in today’s lesson we’re going to see a “repeat offender”: the Jews who returned to Jerusalem. Sadly, within a few generations of the return to Jerusalem, the Jews began to marry idol worshippers (Ezra 9:1–2). Explain that this was the same sin that contributed to their forefathers’ removal from the promised land in the first place.

LEARN, OBEY, AND TEACH (IN THAT ORDER!)

This was how Ezra prepared to teach the people (Ezra 7:10). Illustrate the importance of following God’s ordained order by giving hygiene and fashion tips while exhibiting horrible hygiene and fashion yourself (mess up your hair, put a piece of broccoli between your teeth, wear different colored socks, pants that are too short to cover your ankles, or button your shirt incorrectly). Why should they follow your instructions if you haven’t even followed your own?



IS IT RIGHT TO DO WRONG TO DO RIGHT

This lesson may raise a question: Why were the people of Israel told to divorce their wives, since divorce is wrong? Divorce is wrong, and God hates divorce. It should be avoided at all costs. But the Israelites’ marriages to foreign women were causing them to commit adultery with foreign gods. So in this specific situation, God told them to separate themselves by divorcing their foreign wives.

STEADY GROWTH

Sanctification—the process by which God makes us more and more holy, like Christ—should continue throughout a Christian’s life. Represent this visually by drawing a line that rises steadily, even though the line might not be perfectly straight. Though there may be minor ups and downs, the overall direction is upward.



LEARN, OBEY, AND TEACH

In today’s lesson we learned that Ezra studied God’s Word, practiced what he learned, and then taught it to others. This is a great model for us to follow. We must begin by studying God’s Word so that we understand it and know it. Then we should apply what we have learned to our lives. Finally, we should teach it to others. We should allow them to see how we are living out the truth and help them to do the same. What are some things that you have recently learned from God’s Word? How should you apply these truths to your life? Are you doing what God’s Word says? If so, are you also teaching others God’s Word so that they might repent and obey God’s Word?