#### Lesson 12:

#### Ezra Teaches God’s Law

#### SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

Book of Ezra

#### MEMORY WORK:

Bible skills 1-6 Psalms 119:105

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

I need to read God’s Word every day and obey it (put into practice what I read).

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| **LESSON STARTS HERE** |

INTRODUCTION:

What brave queen did we talk about last week? What did she do that was so brave?

Bring a suitcase to set out as a visual. Ask the children if they have ever been on a long trip. Talk about the things you might take on a trip. (You may even want to “pack” or “unpack” a few things in your suitcase as you talk.) Talk about how sometimes it feels like you will never get to your destination.

Many of God’s people left Babylon and went on a very long trip back to Jerusalem. Even though they were very excited to go back to Jerusalem, they still made bad choices and did not always obey God.

**HISTORICAL NOTE**: The book of Ezra continues the story of the Jews, following the story recorded in 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles. It contains almost all that is known of Jewish history between 538 B.C. (when Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon) and 457 B.C. (when Ezra arrived in Jerusalem). The book briefly describes the return of many Jews from Babylon to Palestine as well as the rebuilding of the Temple. The inspired author of the book had four main purposes: (1) to remind the Jews that God had fulfilled His promises to restore the land He had given them hundreds of years earlier;

(2) to remind the Jews of their covenant with God to be holy people, completely separate from the idol-worshiping nations around them; (3) to help provide God’s people with godly leadership; and (4) to teach them God’s Law and the importance of protecting and obeying it.

The book of Ezra covers about 78 years, but it does not give a continuous description of events. There are at least two large gaps in the sequence of events, and at least one passage (Ezra 4:7-23) is not in chronological order. “There is an interval of [over] 50 years between the last events in the previous historical writings and the events of Ezra. Both Kings and Chronicles close with the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the deportation of many of its inhabitants into Babylonia. There, they were settled in colonies, and were not mistreated as long as they were quiet subjects. Many of them prospered so well that when, later, they had an opportunity to return to their homeland, they chose not to do so. Since the Temple was destroyed, they could not carry on their sacrificial system; but they continued such religious ordinances as the Sabbath and circumcision, and gave great attention to the study of the Law” [*The Living Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5, page 690].

The Persian kings of this time period were Cyrus (538 B.C.), Darius (521-486 B.C.), and Artaxerxes I (464-424 B.C.).

POINTS TO EMPHASIZE:

* 1. Nebuchadnezzar had captured Jerusalem and taken control of all of Judah. He had destroyed the Temple and sent large groups of Jews from Palestine to Babylon. The Jews were held captive in Babylon for 70 years, as Jeremiah had said they would be (because of their great disobedience to God). During that time, the powerful king of Persia, Cyrus, had taken over the Babylonian empire. He decided to let the Jews return to Palestine (Judah) if they wanted to go. Many Jews had become very comfortable in Babylon and did not want to face the hardships of rebuilding Jerusalem and the rest of their homeland. Many of the original captives had died, and their children (born in captivity) did not know anything about Palestine. 42,360 were in the first group who decided to return to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel, who had been appointed governor of Palestine (Nehemiah 7:66-73).
	2. The Jews who did return were faced with many problems, not the least of which was continual interference and harassment by idol worshipping people around them. The Jews started rebuilding the Temple with a great deal of enthusiasm and did finish the work on the Temple—though it was not nearly as grand as before it was destroyed. But over time they listened to their enemies (mainly the Samaritans) more than paying attention to God and His promises, and they stopped rebuilding the rest of Jerusalem. They gradually became more and more like the pagans around them. They married idol worshippers and stopped worshipping God. [See Malachi 1:6-14; 2:11; 3:5. During that time, the prophets Haggai (during the rebuilding of the Temple) and Zechariah did their best to help the people focus on what they needed to do, without much success.]
	3. Years passed, and the Jews in Palestine were becoming more and more like the people who were supposed to be their enemies. Finally, another Persian king, Artaxerxes I, gave Ezra, a priest and scribe, permission to return to Jerusalem. Ezra wanted to go and teach the Jews God’s Law again, because he had heard about the way his people were living. Ezra had been taught the Law very well, and he was very sad that the Jews were ignoring what God had told them to do.
	4. King Artaxerxes wanted to help Ezra, so he sent gold and silver, salt, grain, oil, wine, and garments for the priests who agreed to go. The king said that anyone who refused to listen to Ezra’s teaching would be severely punished. Ezra took about 1,500 Jewish men with him, not counting 250 priests. The king offered to send Persian soldiers to protect Ezra and the others on their long and dangerous journey, but Ezra refused the king’s offer. Ezra wanted the men with him, and the Persians, too, to understand that **God** would protect them. To prepare for their journey, they camped near a river for three days, praying and fasting.
	5. When they finally reached Jerusalem (after about four months of travel), Ezra could see for himself the terrible condition of Jerusalem—and the even worse spiritual condition of the Jews. The Jews had not been teaching the Law to their children (Nehemiah 13:24), and they had not finished rebuilding Jerusalem. When he found out how many Jewish men had married idol-worshipping women, he became so upset that he tore his clothes and pulled at his hair. He was so upset that the Jews had not kept God’s Law that he spent all day praying and weeping; a number of the Jews gathered around him. At the evening sacrifice, Ezra prayed for the Jews and begged for God to forgive them. [Most of Ezra 9 is his anguished prayer to God.]
	6. Many of the Jewish men realized what they had done and promised to “put away their foreign women and children” (i.e., not live with them any longer). Ezra went into a room of the Temple and continued “mourning over the unfaithfulness of the exiles” (Ezra 10:6b).

**NOTE:** For three months, Ezra held a “divorce court” so that the Jewish men could “put away” their idol-worshipping wives. If the children ask about this, explain that the Israelites had been forbidden by God to marry the pagans of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7:3-5). Besides the fact that they would be influenced individually to forsake God, He was concerned that the physical nation of Israel would cease to be a set apart group of people—the holy descendants of Abraham, through whom He had promised to bless the world (through Jesus). Now that Jesus has come, the latter reason is no longer in effect. It is still unwise for Christians to marry non-Christians because of the danger of being spiritually corrupted (1 Corinthians 15:33), but it has not been deemed by God as a reason worthy of divorce under the New Covenant.

Make sure the children understand that the “foreign women” were not acceptable to God because they worshipped idols—not because of their skin color or “race.”

* 1. An announcement was made to all the Jews that they were to come to Jerusalem three days later. [Several thousand poor and/or older Jews had been left in the area when Jerusalem was destroyed. The people summoned by Ezra would no doubt have been the survivors of that group and their children, etc.] All the Jewish men came to Jerusalem and stood in the open square at the front of the Temple, in heavy rain, to hear what God wanted them to do.
	2. Ezra worked with the Jews for several years, teaching them about God’s Word. At one time, the people stood outside from early in the morning until the middle of the day, listening as Ezra read the Law to them. He read God’s Word to them and taught them what it meant (Nehemiah 8:1-8). Because of Ezra’s efforts, and the efforts of others who helped him, most of the Jews listened and decided to repent and obey God’s Law again.
	3. Ezra was a like a missionary, going to a faraway place to teach people about God’s Word. But the people he went to were his own people—Jews who should have known God’s Word but had chosen to ignore it. We can and must help missionaries go to other places to teach God’s Word, but we must remember that it is our individual responsibility to study the Bible, practice what we learn from it every day, and teach people that live in our own cities, on our own blocks, and in our own schools. We cannot be pleasing to God if we think only “other people” need to learn about Him and His Word, that only “other people” need to obey Him, and that only “other people” need to go teach the lost.

RECOMMENDED ADDITIONAL VISUALS (**note disclaimers**):

##### Free Bible Images on Flash Drive. May be presented on classroom tv

##### Betty Lukens’ felt pieces

##### Ezra and Nehemiah ABeka Flash-A-Card Series (DISCLAIMER: use the cards, not the lesson book)

##### Bible Study Guide for All Ages (BSGFAA) Lessons 406, 407, 412. Lesson 412 is the actual lesson about Ezra. The other visuals give a background for the Israelites returning to Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple. These visuals will look like a black and white comic strip on one large piece of cardstock. To use these attach it to the magnetic dry erase board. Use dry erase markers to follow the directions. Let students take turns marking on the page.

##### Suitcase

SONGS AND FINGERPLAYS :

# Prophet SUNDAY

LEARNING CENTERS AND ACTIVITIES:

* Make Scrolls- Use craft sticks and felt to make small scrolls. Discuss how people in the Bible times used scrolls instead of Bibles like we have today. Include a scripture on the scroll that is relevant to the lesson. A scroll craft kit is also available through oriental trading.



### WEDNESDAY NIGHT

#### POINTS TO EMPHASIZE:

1. Review Sunday’s lesson. (See [Review Questions](http://www.apcurriculum.com/dcirfol/4-24-32RQ.pdf) for example questions.)

LEARNING CENTERS AND ACTIVITIES:

* Take a long walk around the church building, discussing the long journey the Jews had

 to make as they returned to Jerusalem. Have a place to stop, share a snack (very basic, such as grapes or raisins, unleavened bread, cheese, water), and read a few verses, such as Deuteronomy 12:28; 13:4; 15:4b-5; 7:6; Ezra 8:3,22b.

* Discuss with the children the importance of reading the Bible **every** day. Make a chart for

 each child to take home to keep track of how often they read their Bibles. On the top of the chart, print/copy “I will read my Bible every day!” Send a letter home with the charts asking parents to let their child read (or the parents read to them) from the Bible each day and put a sticker on their chart each time they read. (“[Bible Reading Calendar](http://www.apcurriculum.com/dcirfol/4-26-35-190Bible%20Reading%20Calendar.pdf)” provided in lesson file)

### Review Questions

1. During the time that Judah was in Babylonian captivity, who was the powerful king of Persia who had taken over the Babylonian empire?
	1. Cyrus
2. How many Jews were in the first group that decided to return to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel?
	1. 42,360
3. What did Ezra want to do after he was given permission to return to Jerusalem?
	1. He wanted to go and teach the Jews God’s Law again because he had heard that his people were living like pagans.
4. What did King Artaxerxes give to Ezra?
	1. Gold and silver, salt, grain and oil, wine, and garments for the priests who agreed to go
5. What did the king say would happen to anyone who refused to listen to Ezra’s teachings?
	1. They would be severely punished.
6. How many Jewish men and how many priests did Ezra take back to Jerusalem with him?
	1. 1,500 Jewish men and 250 priests
7. How many days did they camp by the river?
	1. Three days
8. What did Ezra do when he saw the terrible condition of Jerusalem, and the spiritual condition of the Jews?
	1. He tore his clothes, pulled his hair, and spent all day praying and weeping.
9. What did many of the Jewish men promise to do once they realized what they had done?
	1. They promised to put away their foreign women and children.
10. What did Ezra do to help the Jews to change their ways?
	1. He taught them God’s Word and what it meant.

Additional Notes / Activities Performed & Curriculum Feed Back

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