

EZRA TAUGHT GOD'S LAW

EZRA 7-10; NEHEMIAH 8



KEY PASSAGE: John 20:31

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What is the Bible about? The Bible is the story of God's plan to save people through Jesus.

CHRIST CONNECTION: Ezra taught God's law, and the people recognized their sin. Jesus came to fulfill the law and gives us power to turn away from sin through His death and resurrection. Through faith in Jesus, our hearts are changed so we can love and obey God.

STORY POINT: Ezra returned to Jerusalem and faithfully taught God's law to His people.



PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

LEADER Bible Study

In His providence, God raised up Ezra to be a leader who realized the people of God needed to do more than just rebuild the buildings and walls in Jerusalem. If all the buildings and infrastructure of Jerusalem were completely rebuilt, but the people did not know God and His good commands, then all their rebuilding would be in vain.

Ezra was a faithful scribe and priest who returned to Jerusalem with a clear mission: to teach the law of God to the people. Ezra 7:10 tells us that Ezra had determined to know the law, obey the law, and teach the law to the people of God in Jerusalem. Ezra's commitment and desire to teach the law was not merely to speak its truth; he intended to live the truth of it as well.

From dawn until noon, Ezra read from the law of Moses, instructing God's people in His commands and reminding them of God's faithfulness. The response of the people to the reading of the law was overwhelming. They wept when they heard God's Word because they were confronted with the reality of their sin. Ultimately, the people repented of their sins and made a commitment to follow God's law.

Ezra's commitment to living and teaching the law reminds us of the importance of devoting ourselves to knowing, understanding, and living out God's Word. This opens our lives to God's transformative work through His truth and the power of the Holy Spirit who conforms us into the image of Jesus. Through our study of God's Word, we also realize our absolute need for Him. God's Word reveals our sin and reminds us that we are incapable of saving ourselves. Because of God's faithful love, He sent His Son to take our sin upon Himself so that we can be forgiven and receive eternal salvation.

Ezra's ministry reminds us of the power of Scripture to transform lives. God's Word reveals our sin, leads us to repentance, and shows us the way to restoration. Point kids to see how followers of Jesus are called to know, understand, obey, and share God's words as they point others to the gospel.



PREPARE

THE WEEK PRIOR

Prepare your heart to teach; plan the session



WELCOME

10–15 MINUTES

Greet kids and open the session



LEARN

25–30 MINUTES

Teach kids the story of the gospel



LOVE

15–20 MINUTES

Lead kids to love the God of the gospel



LIVE

15–20 MINUTES

Lead kids to live out the mission of the gospel



PREPARE

PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

GATHER Supplies

Keep a regular supply of the following items available at all times: Bibles, pens or pencils, markers, crayons, colored pencils, scissors, glue or tape, paper.



WELCOME

Activity Page

- ☐ "Something's Different" activity page

Session Starter (Option 1)

- ☐ "Picture Clues" printable, 1 per group

Session Starter (Option 2)

- ☐ index cards
- ☐ bowl



LOVE

Review & Bible Skills

- ☐ Small Group Timeline and Map Set (optional)



LIVE

Activity Choice (Option 1)

- ☐ heart-shaped papers
- ☐ painter's tape

Activity Choice (Option 2)

- ☐ cardstock
- ☐ yarn or string
- ☐ hole punches, 1 per group
- ☐ party hats (optional)
- ☐ music (optional)

Reflection and Prayer

- ☐ Bible story coloring page



LEARN

Introduce the Session

- ☐ countdown video
- ☐ Story Point Poster

Big Picture Question

- ☐ Big Picture Question Poster

Review the Timeline

- ☐ Giant Timeline

Tell the Bible Story

- ☐ "Ezra Taught God's Law" video
- ☐ Bible Story Picture Poster
- ☐ paper scroll (optional)
- ☐ party blowers and hats, 1 per kid (optional)

Questions from Kids

- ☐ "Unit 18, Session 2" Questions from Kids video

Missions Moment

- ☐ "Bowman Family Photo" printable

Key Passage Activity

- ☐ Key Passage Poster
- ☐ "Life in His Name (John 20:31)" song
- ☐ worship song of your choice (optional)



WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

SAY “When have you needed help understanding how to do something? Maybe you didn’t know how to complete a math problem or you didn’t understand how to build a project.”

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the “Something’s Different” activity page.

SAY “God calls us to be different than the world. Today, we will see how Ezra taught God’s law to the people. When we read God’s Word, we learn how God wants us to live.”

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Print a copy of the “Picture Clues” printable for each group of three or four kids. Challenge kids to look at the group of pictures and determine what the pictures mean. Invite groups to share their answers. Then review the answers below.

(1. A dog runs after a ball. 2. I see a red umbrella.
3. A girl loves ice cream. 4. A bird nests in a tree.)

SAY “Was it hard to understand what the pictures meant? Sometimes, we need help understanding what we are seeing or hearing. Today, we will see how **EZRA RETURNED TO JERUSALEM AND FAITHFULLY TAUGHT GOD’S LAW TO HIS PEOPLE**. But God’s people needed help understanding the law. Thankfully, those who had studied the law—the Levites—helped the people understand. Let’s get ready to learn more about God’s Word.”

☐ OPTION 2: ACT IT OUT



Before this activity, write out simple actions on index cards, such as pray, brush your teeth, make a bowl of cereal and eat it, play baseball, etc. Place the cards inside a bowl. Then form kids into two teams. Ask for a volunteer from the first team to draw a card from the bowl. Quietly assist kids with reading the action listed on the card, if needed. Direct the kid to act out the action listed on the card and challenge the kids on his team to call out their guesses. Allow 20 seconds for the team to guess. If they shout out the correct action, that team earns one point. If they have not guessed the correct answer within the 20 seconds, invite the other team to guess for a chance at earning a point for their team. The team with the most points wins.

SAY “You all did a great job doing what was on the card. Today, we will see how Ezra taught God’s words to the people and told them to do what it said. As we hear our story, we can remember that when we hear God’s Word, it’s important that we obey it.”





INTRODUCE the Bible Story

1 INTRODUCE THE SESSION (3 minutes)

Show the countdown video as you transition to introduce the Bible story. Set it to end as the session begins.

SAY “Hi, kids! My name is [your name], and I’m so glad you are here. If you brought your Bible, can you please hold it up? [Distribute Bibles to kids who need one.] Today, we will be in the Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

God’s Word is the most important book we will ever read. The Bible is the way God communicates with us so we can know Him and how He made a plan to save us from our sins. Each time we read God’s Word, we should spend time understanding what it says and obeying it. Today, we will learn that **EZRA RETURNED TO JERUSALEM AND FAITHFULLY TAUGHT GOD’S LAW TO HIS PEOPLE.** [Display the Story Point Poster.] God used Ezra to help God’s people better understand His law. When the people understood what God’s law said, they realized their sin and their need to obey God. Let’s pray together: ‘God, thank You for Your Word, the Bible. Help us hear Your Word, understand it, and obey it. Amen.’ ”

2 BIG PICTURE QUESTION (1 minute)

Display the Big Picture Question Poster.

SAY “Last week, we learned our new big picture question. Do you remember it? [Allow responses.] **What is the Bible about?** What is the answer? [Allow responses.] **The Bible is the story of God’s plan to save people through Jesus.** Let’s say the answer one more time: **The Bible is the story of God’s plan to save people through Jesus.**

As we read the Bible, we come to understand that God is perfect and must punish sin. Because we are sinners, we need to be saved from our sin. We can’t do this on our own—we need a Savior. Jesus is the Savior God provided. Today, as we hear how Ezra read God’s words to the people, we’ll see how the people understood they had sinned against God. They needed God to save them. From beginning to end, the whole Bible points us to Jesus—the only One who can save us from sin. ”

3 REVIEW THE TIMELINE (1 minute)

Show the Giant Timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

SAY “Last week, we saw how Nehemiah heard Jerusalem was in ruins and asked the king to let him return. Through God’s help, Nehemiah led the people to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. Even when their enemies tried to stop them, God was in control and gave His people strength to finish their task. Today, we will see how another man named Ezra returned to Jerusalem. We’ll see how God’s people living in Jerusalem were not obeying God’s law. So, Ezra read the law and helped the people recognize their sin and their need to obey God. ”



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LEARN the Bible Story

1 TELL THE BIBLE STORY: VIDEO OR STORYTELLER (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Ezra 7:6-20,27; 8:31; 9:1-3,5-11; 10:1-17; Nehemiah 8. Use the Bible storytelling tips to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “Ezra Taught God’s Law.” Use the bold text to retell or review the story.

EZRA TAUGHT GOD’S LAW

“Ezra was a scribe and a priest, and he knew the law of Moses. He had committed to study the law of the Lord, obey it, and teach it to all God’s people.

King Artaxerxes wrote a letter that said, “Any of God’s people who want to go back to Jerusalem with Ezra may go. Make sure to bring all the silver and the gold that I and others have given to the God of Israel. And if you need anything else for the house of God, you may use the royal treasury to pay for it.” Ezra praised God, thanking Him for the kindness and generosity of the king. God was with Ezra and strengthened him for the journey to Jerusalem.

After Ezra returned to Jerusalem, he met with some leaders of the people. Ezra learned that some of the people and their leaders had disobeyed God because they did not separate themselves from the surrounding nations and their wicked practices. Ezra tore his clothes and was very upset. Ezra got on his knees and prayed to God, confessing the people’s sin. As he did this, God’s people began to gather around Ezra. They cried and confessed their sin too, promising to be faithful to God.

Then Ezra brought the book of the law of Moses and read it before all who could listen with understanding. He read the law from dawn until noon. All the people listened very carefully and lifted their hands and said, “Amen, Amen!” Then they knelt and worshiped God with their faces to the ground.

Then, Levites came to the people and began to explain the law so the people could better understand what was read. The people began to cry as they heard the words of the law, because they realized they had not been obeying God.

Nehemiah and Ezra said, “This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not be sad! Go and eat good food and drink what is sweet, because today is holy. The joy of the LORD is your strength.”

Then all the people had a great celebration with food and drinks because they understood the words of the law that Ezra taught them.

Christ Connection: Ezra taught God’s law, and the people recognized their sin. Jesus came to fulfill the law and gives us power to turn away from sin through His death and resurrection. Through faith in Jesus, our hearts are changed so we can love and obey God.”

STORYTELLING TIPS

Use a prop: Create a scroll by using brown paper or a paper grocery bag. Roll the top and bottom ends in, creating a scroll.

Throw a celebration: At the end of the story, pass out party blowers and party hats to each kid. Invite kids to celebrate how the people understood God’s words. Invite kids to celebrate how the Bible is the story of God’s plan to save people through Jesus.



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

SAY “ Ezra was a scribe and a priest who loved God’s law. Being a scribe meant that Ezra would copy down the words of God’s law. He studied the law, obeyed it, and taught it to others. King Artaxerxes gave Ezra permission to return to Jerusalem and help the people follow God’s ways. What did Ezra discover when he arrived in Jerusalem? **[Allow responses.]** When Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, he realized that many of the people, including their leaders, had disobeyed God by following the sinful ways of other nations. Ezra was heartbroken. He tore his clothes, got on his knees, and prayed, asking God to forgive them.

What did the people do when they realized they had sinned? **[Allow responses.]** The people began to confess their sins too. They cried because of their sin and promised to turn back to God and be faithful. It is good to be sad over our sin. When we understand how sin dishonors God and hurts ourselves and others, feeling sad is a right response.

Later, Ezra gathered the people and read God’s law to them from morning until noon. The people listened carefully, worshiped God, and lifted their hands in praise. But when the Levites came and helped the people understand God’s law, what did the people do? **[Allow responses.]** They began to cry again because they understood how they had disobeyed God. But Ezra and Nehemiah told them not to be sad, because the joy of the Lord was their strength. When we know we have sinned, and we repent, we can also feel joy knowing that God has forgiven us and loves us. So, the people had a great feast and rejoiced because they now understood God’s Word. ”

3 GOSPEL DISCUSSION

SAY “ Ezra taught God’s law, and the people recognized their sin. As we realize our sin, we see our need for the Savior. Jesus came to fulfill the law and gives us power to turn away from sin through His death and resurrection. Through faith in Jesus, our hearts are changed so we can love and obey God. ”

(Tip: Use Scripture and the Gospel Plan Poster to explain how to become a Christian. Create an environment where kids are welcome to ask questions about what it means to follow Jesus.)

4 QUESTIONS FROM KIDS (3 minutes)

Show the “Unit 18, Session 2” Questions from Kids video. Prompt kids to discuss:

1. How do you recognize your sin?
2. How does God help us turn away from sin?

5 MISSIONS MOMENT (3 minutes)

Display the “Bowman Family Photo” printable. Remind kids that Brian Bowman is the lead pastor of Valley Life Church in Phoenix, Arizona. Brian is also a Send City missionary for the North American Mission Board. Part of Brian’s job as a Send City missionary is to help other churches start new churches and reach out to different people groups in the area.



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

SAY “ One group that Valley Life Church is reaching out to in Phoenix is a group of Taiwanese people, who have moved to the area for jobs. Teams from the church have started building relationships with the Taiwanese people by teaching English classes and starting community groups so they can tell the people about Jesus.

Valley Life Church also works with a small organization to help meet the needs of people who are homeless. Once a month, members of the church provide a meal to the organization, showing kindness to those who are in need. Believers desire to help others because they know how God has met their greatest need through Jesus. ”

Pray for God to raise up workers from inside Phoenix to help other people grow as Christians, start new churches, and train teams of people who will start the next churches.

6 KEY PASSAGE ACTIVITY (5 minutes)

Show the Key Passage Poster. Lead kids in reading aloud John 20:31 together.

SAY “ Let’s continue learning our key passage that reminds us of the importance of God’s Word and the good news that Jesus came to save us and give us life. ”

Read the entire key passage aloud. Then, read the key passage again, leaving out one word of the key passage. Challenge kids to shout out the missing word. Continue repeating the key passage aloud, leaving out a different word each time. For an added challenge, leave out a short phrase and encourage kids to shout out the missing phrase.

Lead kids to sing “Life in His Name (John 20:31).” You may also choose to sing a worship song of your choice.

7 PRAY (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before transitioning to Love.

SAY “ Thank You, Lord, for speaking to us through Your Word. Help us grow in understanding as we read the Bible. Give us the desire to obey You and follow You. In Jesus’ name, amen. ”

Transition from **LEARN** to **LOVE**





THE GOD OF THE GOSPEL

LOVE God by Applying the Story

1 REVIEW & BIBLE SKILLS (5 minutes)

Distribute Bibles and display the Old Testament Kingdoms Map. Guide kids to open their Bibles to Ezra 7. Explain that the book of Ezra is in the History division of the Old Testament. Invite kids to see how many chapters are in Ezra.

Consider pointing out Jerusalem (H5) on the Old Testament Kingdoms Map. Choose a volunteer to read aloud Ezra 7:10 or ask the kids to follow along as you read the verse aloud.

SAY “Ezra made a firm decision to learn God’s Word, follow it, and teach it to others. God wants us to know Him, live in ways that honor Him, and encourage others to do the same. When we study the Bible, we grow closer to God and learn how He loves us, provides for us, and rescues us from sin. As we study the Bible, God also calls us to obey His words.

But obeying God all the time is impossible because we are sinners! Only Jesus perfectly obeyed God all the time. Jesus came to fulfill the law, and He gives us power to turn away from sin through His death and resurrection. Through faith in Jesus, our hearts are changed so we can love and obey God. As we obey the Lord, we point others to Jesus and share how He saves sinners.”

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

SAY “How can we respond when we sin?”

Remind kids that when we sin, we should be quick to confess our sin to God, turn away from sin, and turn to God. The Bible tells us that if we confess our sins to God, He will forgive us and make us clean (1 John 1:9).

SAY “Who helps you understand God’s Word?”

Point out how God places godly people in our lives to help us understand His Word, such as parents, church leaders, pastors, and even our friends. Encourage kids to see how going to church offers believers a community to study and know God’s Word better. Tell kids that through the church, believers can encourage each other to grow more like Jesus as they study His Word, pray together, and serve one another.

SAY “Why did God want the people to celebrate?”

Explain how God had been merciful to His people, even though they sinned against Him. He brought them back to their land and revealed their sin so they could repent and obey Him. His faithfulness was greater than their sin, and He wanted them to be happy about His goodness. Remind kids that God wants us to celebrate His mercy and kindness in our lives as well. While sin should grieve us, we can also rejoice in God’s salvation, knowing His mercy is greater than our sin.

Transition from **LOVE** to **LIVE**





THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: HIDE YOUR WORD IN MY HEART

Before the session, write each word of Psalm 119:11 and the reference on individual heart papers. Hide the hearts around the room. Challenge kids to find each heart. Then provide kids with a few Bibles and invite them to look up Psalm 119:11. Distribute painter's tape and challenge kids to tape the hearts on a wall in the correct order of the verse. Read the verse aloud together.

SAY “ Today, we learned that Ezra returned to Jerusalem and faithfully taught God’s law to His people. Ezra was committed to reading God’s Word and obeying it. **The Bible is the story of God’s plan to save people through Jesus.** The Bible’s truth, along with the Holy Spirit’s power, also helps us turn away from sin once we are saved. Psalm 119:11 reminds us to hide God’s words in our hearts so we can recognize sin and turn away from it. I encourage you to keep hiding God’s Word in your heart. ”

☐ OPTION 2: PARTY BANNERS

Form kids into groups of three or four. Distribute various colors of cardstock, markers, and scissors to each group. Invite kids to create a party banner. Kids will draw eight triangles on the cardstock, trying to make them equal sizes. With the triangles pointing down, kids will draw designs and write each of the words, *The joy of the Lord is our strength*, one word per triangle. Direct kids to cut out their triangles. Distribute yarn or string to each group and a hole punch. Tell kids to punch a hole at the top corners of each triangle and thread the yarn through the holes to create the banner. Hang the banners around the room. Consider playing music, distributing party hats, and celebrating God’s kindness shown to us through Jesus.

SAY “ While God’s people were sad over the sin, Nehemiah and Ezra told them to celebrate, remembering God’s mercy and the joy He provides. Our sin should make us sad too, but we also have a reason to celebrate: God made the way for our sin to be forgiven through faith in Jesus. Shout for joy, remembering God’s great love for you! ”

2 REFLECTION AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute a sheet of paper and pencil to each kid. Ask kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Who can I tell about this story?

Be sure to send the sheets home with the kids along with the activity pages so parents can continue to discuss the Bible story with their kids. If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page. Pray for your group.