

## Ezra Teaches God's Word

Ezra Teaches God's Word .....	1
Scene Summary .....	1
Scripture .....	1
Players .....	2
Special Props .....	2
Script – Ezra Teaches God's Word .....	3
Supplemental information .....	5
Extra Time .....	6

### **Scene Summary**

“Ezra Teaches God's Word” presents the exciting story of how one man helped revive interest in hearing and obeying God's Word. Scenes include: the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem...the people return to the city after exile...the people gather at a city gate and call for Ezra...Ezra reads God's Word to the people...the people thank God...Ezra reads Moses' laws about a seven-day feast...the people build tents of branches to celebrate the feast as Moses had commanded...they show their sorrow for wrongdoing...they worship God.

### **Scripture**

(Neh 8 NIV) all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel. {2} So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. {3} He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. {4} Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam. {5} Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. {6} Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. {7} The Levites--Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah--instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. {8} They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read. {9} Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. {10} Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do

not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." {11} The Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve." {12} Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them. {13} On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the scribe to give attention to the words of the Law. {14} They found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month {15} and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: "Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make booths"--as it is written. {16} So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves booths on their own roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God and in the square by the Water Gate and the one by the Gate of Ephraim. {17} The whole company that had returned from exile built booths and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great. {18} Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the feast for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.

(Neh 9:1-3 NIV) On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads. {2} Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers. {3} They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshipping the LORD their God.

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## ***Players***

- **Narrator** – The play's "catechist" or teacher, should be a good reader with a clear voice.
- **Ezra** – The main character, should be a strong leader, acting with authority.
- **Person 1, 2** – These parts can be divided using more players as needed.

## ***Special Props***

- Normal items from the prop box such as cloaks, veils, robes and headdresses.
- Large Bible for Ezra.

## ***Script – Ezra Teaches God's Word***

**Narrator:** Nehemiah and his helpers looked proudly at the strong walls that ran all along the city of Jerusalem. They had worked hard to build them up again. Now, they knew it would be safe for the people to come back. Years before, an enemy had captured Jerusalem and had taken the Jewish leaders and the strongest people far away, into Babylon, but now the Jews could move back to their own city. How happy they were as they arrived in Jerusalem.

[Scene change to the streets of Jerusalem]

**Narrator:** Near one of the gates of the city, people gathered.

**Person 1:** It is good to be in Jerusalem!

**Person 2:** Our own city!

**Person 1:** Thank God!

**Person 2:** Ezra! Bring God's book and read to us.

**Person 1:** Yes, read God's book.

**Narrator:** So, Ezra went to get God's book. He returned and stood on a platform that some people had made. Everyone wanted to see and hear him as he read from God's book. [pause] Ezra read the words of the law that God had told to Moses. Quietly, the people listened. When he finished reading the people lifted their hands and heads toward heaven and praised God.

**Person 1:** We will obey God's law.

**Person 2:** Yes, God's word is right.

**Narrator:** The people were so glad to be back in Jerusalem. They bowed their heads and thanked God for helping them make the long trip from Babylon. They remembered how God had helped them many times. [pause] Then they listened more as Ezra told them more about God's rules. Many people cried because they had forgotten God's rules and had not obeyed them.

**Ezra:** Don't be sad! God wants you to be happy. Go home and fix a good meal. Be glad that God is our helper.

**Narrator:** The people thought about the good things that God had done for them. They thought about God's laws and how the laws could help them too. The people smiled as they hurried home. They fixed their best foods. Mothers and fathers, boys and girls laughed and talked as they ate, and they also shared their food with poor people. [pause] The next day, the fathers, priests and Levites went back to hear more of God's laws. Ezra read from the big scroll.

**Person 1:** What does that mean?

**Narrator:** Ezra and his helpers explained God's laws.

**Ezra:** God says that you shall have a feast for seven days before the Lord. On the first day, gather leafy tree branches and make tents for shelter. They will remind you and your children that I am your God and that I care for you.

**Narrator:** When the people heard this, they hurried to the country. They cut low branches from the trees and bushes. They looked for thick branches too. Then, they hurried back to the city. [pause] Some built their leafy tents on the flat roofs of their houses. Others built their tents in the city streets. When they were finished, they sat in their tents and thought about God.

**Person 1:** God is good. He loves us.

**Narrator:** Shortly after the week of the feast, the people came together again. They wanted to show God that they were sorry that they had disobeyed His rules. Each person told God that they were sorry for doing wrong. Then, Ezra read to them from the Bible scroll. How happy the people were to hear God's words.

**Ezra:** Thank you. Thank you God for giving us your rules.

The End

## ***Supplemental information***

Long before this story opens, enemies had captured Jerusalem. To make sure that the city would not become powerful again, many leaders and important people were taken far away to Babylon. The best of these that were taken away were sent to school in Babylon. They would become the leaders over the other Jews that had been scattered over the many Babylonian provinces or states. Even though the Jews were far from their country, they thought and dreamed about going back to their capitol city Jerusalem. The temple was in Jerusalem, where they had worshiped God, and the city was their home.

Many years went by. The people grew old and died. Their children and grandchildren thought about what they had been told about Jerusalem and the country that belonged to the Jews and about the magnificent temple.

Ezra was a descendent of Hilkiah, who found the scroll of the law hidden in the temple during the reign of king Josiah. “Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, son of Zerariah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of the chief priest Aaron-- this Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses that the LORD the God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was upon him.” (Ezra 7:1-6)

Ezra was a chief scribe. His job was to study the law that God had given to Moses many years earlier. Day after day, Ezra read the Bible scrolls. He thought about God's laws and thought about what God wanted him and other people to do. Ezra hoped that some day he could make the long trip to Jerusalem. He hoped that many of the Jews in Babylon could go to Jerusalem to live. His desire was to teach God's laws to the people in and around Jerusalem. So, Ezra studied hard. He wanted to be ready to teach God's laws to the people. In Babylon, when anyone wanted to know something about God's laws, they asked Ezra. Everyone knew that he could answer their questions.

Finally, the Babylonian king permitted Ezra to go to Jerusalem with many others Jews. The king appointed Ezra the special job of teaching God's law to the people in Jerusalem. Ezra took with him more than 1700 people. There were priest and Levites to serve in the temple. There were porters to carry heavy loads and guides to show them the way. Travel was always dangerous. Robbers often hid along the roads. Most travelers had armed soldiers to go along and protect them, but Ezra depended upon God to protect them on their long journey. They arrived safely in Jerusalem after their four-month trip.

Ezra may have stayed only a short time, and then returned to his job in Babylon. Possibly, he returned to Jerusalem several years later. With God's help, Nehemiah had rebuilt the walls of the city and many people had returned there to live. At this time, the people had a great interest in knowing the laws of God, and Ezra was ready to teach them.

### ***Extra Time***

Only part of the Bible was written when Ezra lived. Hundreds of years earlier, God had given His laws to Moses. He told Moses to teach them to all the people. These rules and some of the Old Testament stories were the only parts of the Bible that had been written at the time. Ezra studied God's rules to find out what God wanted him to do. Ezra's Bible was not a book. Words were written by hand on a long piece of fine leather, and then rolled up to form a scroll.

Let your pupils make a Bible-verse scroll to remind them of Ezra and his Bible scroll. For each child you will need two round popsicle sticks and a half sheet of paper. Let each child print these words on their strip of paper: "Be doers of the Word and not hearers only." James 1:22

Let each child paste a sucker stick at one end of the paper then roll the paper around the stick. The second stick is to be pasted at the other end of the paper and rolled toward the center of the paper. When rolls meet, tie with a piece of yarn or string. Words on the scrolls will remind children to obey God's rules.