



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

NOVEMBER 07 2020

leading them home

Scripture Story: Ezra 7–10.

Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapters 50, 51.

Key Text: Ezra 7:10.

PREPARING TO TEACH

This lesson is primarily about leadership and preparing the heart to follow God's will. It is important to impress on the students that any person with the right attitude, discipline, and desire can lead people for God.

I. SYNOPSIS

Ezra is preparing to take the children of Israel home—at least those who want to come back home with him. He is a strong and learned man, about whom it says in 7:10: “For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel” (NIV). He was a leader, a teacher, and a doer of the Law and will of God.

The story goes on to tell us that many Israelites did go back with Ezra, although he had to make multiple pleas at times to get those he needed (the Levites in particular) to come along with him. He came to realize, however, that many of the Israelites who returned with him were not honoring the teachings of God's law in their lives. Therefore, he had to stand firm on the issue of intermarriage. God had given ample instruction to the Jewish nation about the dangers of intermarriages with nonbelievers. Such alliances would be a threat to the nation because they would undermine the spirituality of God's chosen people and neutralize their unique identity as bastions of God's truth among the nations.

As we teach this week we want to be very cognizant of the fact that becoming a leader is something that anyone can do with the right attitude and desire to know the will of God. While we don't necessarily know

the kind of person Ezra was, what we can surmise is that he was disciplined, desirous of a relationship with God, and passionate for God's people. We should be leading the young people to these same values.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Become more familiar with an important character and story in the Bible. (*Know*)
- Sense that God has a call on their lives. (*Feel*)
- Understand what is required of a spiritual leader and agree to go where God leads. (*Respond*)

III. EXPLORE

Spiritual Gifts and Ministries, Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs, no. 17: “God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts that each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity. Given by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who apports to each member as He wills, the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained functions. According to the Scriptures, these gifts include such ministries as faith, healing, prophecy, proclamation, teaching, administration, reconciliation, compassion, and self-sacrificing service and charity for the help and encouragement of people. . . . When members employ these spiritual gifts as faithful stewards of God's varied grace, the church is protected from the destructive influence of false doctrine, grows with a growth that is from God, and is built up in faith and love.” (Acts 6:1-7; Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 27, 28; Ephesians 4:8,

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the *What Do You Think?* section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Ask students to read the *What Do You Think?* section of their lesson and then ask the following questions:

- Do any of you go to school away from home? If so, what does it feel like to come home?
- Do you think it would make a difference if home were a shack compared to the mansion you live in at school? (Babylon to Jerusalem parallel).
- What do you think God is calling you to do? Lead, follow?
- How far are you willing to go for God?
- Is there anyone you can look to in your life and say they are a spiritual leader? (Pastors are excluded.)

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Alexander the Great, the Greek king, once led his troops across a hot, arid desert. After nearly two weeks of marching, he and his soldiers were near death from thirst, yet Alexander pushed ahead.

In the noonday sun, two of his scouts brought what little water they were able to find. It barely filled a cup. Alexander's troops were shocked when he poured the water into the burning sand.

The king said, "It is of no use for one to drink when many thirst."

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

While Alexander went on to many victories, he also had a few problems. When you juxtapose this with Ezra's leadership style you can see a vast difference. While Ezra was also willing to be the kind of leader who would not abandon his people in their time of need, he also had a very different starting point from Alexander.

Alexander's leadership was much about him, while Ezra was always seeking the heart of God in his

leadership of God's people. Ezra was never one to let his ego go in front of his responsibility to God, and to those who were entrusted into his care.

As Christ-called leaders, we must be willing to submit ourselves to His will, constantly seeking His heart and devoting ourselves to the study of His Word.

As we humble ourselves before God He will give us His strength and His wisdom to lead His people to where God desires them to go.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the *Into the Story* section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- What is the most important text in this group of texts? *Underline it.*
- Why do you think a genealogy was included in this story? Please explain.
- *Highlight* your favorite text out of the group.
- The Scripture story tells us that Ezra was "a teacher well versed in the law of Moses." What does this tell us about the attributes of spiritual leadership?
- The passage speaks of all the different people who came to be part of the Temple worship: priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Temple servants. What does this tell us about worship and God's will for worship?
- The king was gracious to God's people, giving them articles of gold and silver for the Temple, as well as money to buy sacrificial animals. Why do you think he was so generous?
- What does this passage tell us about God, about us, and about our relationship with God?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: Luke 5:1-6; Exodus 4:1-12.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

There is a great deal of background important to understanding this story of Ezra. Perhaps the first point is that Ezra bringing the children of Israel back is a fulfillment of prophecy. It harkens back to Isaiah 44 and 45. It is possible that Cyrus had heard of the prophecy of Isaiah—this he could possibly have learned from Daniel. But regardless of how little or how much he knew, King Cyrus was used by God in order



Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Media Minds

Whenever possible, use media to create a better understanding of the history and background of the story you are talking about. Things such as PowerPoint presentations, video clips, and even using Google Earth to see the area we are talking about. This creates an opportunity for young people to see and hear, which always adds to the spiritual and educational experience. Where this is not possible, you can always explain to them what life would have been like for Ezra and the people of Israel.

to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah.

The purpose of Ezra's account is interesting. It was probably written about 400 B.C., or a little later. The author was interested in encouraging the Jews in their despondency. They had returned in part from the Babylonian exile and had been able to rebuild the Temple. However, they really didn't have any true political freedom, and they were not able to reestablish King David's royal line.

The author saw clearly that in the history of Israel two things were intertwined: the Davidic line and the Temple. Therefore, he wrote a history of both things so that people might understand that if the Temple had been restored, then it was very possible that the restoration of the monarchy might happen as well.

However, what he did not understand was that the Temple without the coming Messiah was really just an empty shell.

Although the people, at least in part, were back in Judah, they were still not wholeheartedly following the law of God. While we have spent the majority of the time on the spiritual leadership of Ezra, it is important to note how Ezra was a firm believer in following the commands of God.

This is why Ezra was greatly distressed when he found out that many of the leaders in Israel had chosen to intermarry with women of foreign origin. "In his study of the causes leading to the Babylonish captivity, Ezra had learned that Israel's apostasy was largely traceable to their mingling with heathen nations. He

had seen that if they had obeyed God's command to keep separate from the nations surrounding them, they would have been spared many sad and humiliating experiences. Now when he learned that notwithstanding the lessons of the past, men of prominence had dared transgress the laws given as a safeguard against apostasy, his heart was stirred within him" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 620).

Ezra proved to be a man of God. He identified with the guilt of the people and interceded on their behalf, praying earnestly for God's forgiveness. His interces-

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**

Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Flashlight**

*Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book *Prophets and Kings*. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from *Out of the Story*.*

- **Punch Lines**

Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.

- **Further Insight**

Ask them how the quotes in Further Insight convey the point of the story in this lesson.

sory prayer for the people is recorded in Ezra 9.

“This was the beginning of a wonderful reformation. With infinite patience and tact, and with a careful consideration for the rights and welfare of every individual concerned, Ezra and his associates strove to lead the penitent of Israel into the right way. Above all else, Ezra was a teacher of the law; and as he gave personal attention to the examination of every case, he sought to impress the people with the holiness of this law and the blessings to be gained through obedience” (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 622).

Last, Ezra can be considered a “type” of Christ our High Priest (Hebrews 7). While not a one-to-one distinction, such as that found in Romans with the use of Adam as the “type” and Christ as the “Antitype,” it is still a strong parallel that shows us that Christ is truly our High Priest, both spiritually and in a historical context, as we look back on the way Ezra led his people. Christ has always fallen into the role of leader and teacher. As well, Jesus has had that same ability as Ezra to be both flexible and inspirational as a leader. We are blessed to have such great examples of spiritual leadership.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Give each person a 3" x 5" card and have them list the attributes they are looking for in a spiritual leader. In fact, if you give them the cards at the beginning of the class, you can ask them the question before the lesson as well as after. Their answers might change with the influx of new information through the study of Ezra. At the end, collect the cards and have a prayer that each student might become one of those spiritual leaders.

Summary

Spiritual leadership and a desire to follow the will of God is of paramount importance to this lesson. We see Ezra, a priestly leader, devoting himself to the study of God’s Word and will, as well as being a man of action who does what God is calling him to do. He is also a man who understands the human condition and is not so inflexible that he is not willing to work for both the good of the community and the good of the call of God in his life and the life of the children of Israel.

Young people need to understand what it means to be a good spiritual leader. Hopefully, you as the teacher have had the opportunity to be that spiritual leader to your young people. As they see the principles shown to us in Ezra, may they come to understand how you are that type of leader and how they can be as well.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings (or Royalty and Ruin)*,* chapters 50, 51.

*A special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings* has been created by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.