

# ADULT BIBLE TEACHING GUIDE

## *Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, Nehemiah, Malachi*

RESTORING THE FUTURE

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*Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, Nehemiah, Malachi: Restoring  
the Future—Adult Bible Teaching Guide*

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# How to Make the Best Use of This Teaching Guide

Leading a class in studying the Bible is a sacred trust. This *Teaching Guide* has been prepared to help you as you give your best to this important task.

In each lesson, you will find first “Bible Comments” for teachers, to aid you in your study and preparation. The three sections of “Bible Comments” are “Understanding the Context,” “Interpreting the Scriptures,” and “Focusing on the Meaning.” “Understanding the Context” provides a summary overview of the entire background passage that also sets the passage in the context of the Bible book being studied. “Interpreting the Scriptures” provides verse-by-verse comments on the focal passage. “Focusing on the Meaning” offers help with the meaning and application of the focal text.

The second main part of each lesson is “Teaching Plans.” You’ll find two complete teaching plans in this section. The first is called “Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities,” and the second is called “Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions.” Choose the plan that best fits your class and your style of teaching. You may also use and adapt ideas from both. Each plan is intended to be practical, helpful, and immediately useful as you prepare to teach.

The major headings in each teaching plan are intended to help you sequence how you teach so as to follow the flow of how people tend to learn. The first major heading, “Connect with Life,” provides ideas that will help you begin the class session where your class is and draw your class into the study. The second major heading, “Guide Bible Study,” offers suggestions for helping your class engage the Scriptures actively and develop a greater understanding of this portion of the Bible’s message. The third major heading, “Encourage Application,” is meant to help participants focus on how to respond with their lives to this message.

As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. You might use one or more of the following methods:

- In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying with your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents in their *Study Guides* and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date on which each lesson will be studied.
- If all of your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
- Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org) on the Resources for Adults page.
- Develop a sticker with the lesson dates, and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.

**Note:** An Easter lesson is included. If your class uses the Easter lesson, you may need to decide how to study the other lessons, such as by combining two lessons or studying the missed lesson at a special class meeting.

Here are some steps you can take to help you prepare well to teach each lesson and save time in doing so:

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. If your church's adult Bible study teachers meet for lesson overview and preparation, plan to participate. If your church's adult Bible study teachers don't have this planning time now, look for ways to begin. You, your fellow teachers, and your church will benefit from this mutual encouragement and preparation.
3. Overview the study in the *Study Guide*. Look at the table of contents, and see where this lesson fits in the overall study. Then read or review the study introduction to the book that is being studied.

4. Consider carefully the suggested Main Idea, Question to Explore, and Teaching Aim. These can help you discover the main thrust of this particular lesson.
5. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. Using your Bible in your study and in the class session can provide a positive model to class members to use their own Bibles and give more attention to Bible study themselves. (Each writer of the Bible comments in both the *Teaching Guide* and the *Study Guide* has chosen a favorite translation. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translations chosen, of course.)
6. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the Bible comments in the *Study Guide*. The Bible comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible. Read also the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and you can also use them in the class session itself. Continue your Bible study with the aid of the Bible comments included in this *Teaching Guide*.
7. Review the "Teaching Plans" in this *Teaching Guide*. Consider how these suggestions would help you teach this Bible passage in your class to accomplish the teaching aim.
8. Consider prayerfully the needs of your class, and think about how to teach so you can help your class learn best.
9. Develop and follow a lesson plan based on the suggestions in this *Teaching Guide*, with alterations as needed for your class.
10. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.

**FREE!** Additional adult Bible study comments by Dr. Jim Denison, pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, are online at [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org) and can be downloaded free. These lessons are posted on the internet a week in advance of the first Sunday of use.

**FREE!** Downloadable teaching resource items for use in your class are available at [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org)! Watch for them in “Teaching Plans” for each lesson. Then go online to [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org) and click on “Teaching Resource Items” for this study. These items are selected from “Teaching Plans.” They are provided online to make lesson preparation easier for hand-outs and similar items. Permission is granted to download these teaching resource items, print them out, copy them as needed, and use them in your class.

**ALSO FREE!** An additional teaching plan by Dennis Parrott, longtime Christian education leader, is available each week at [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org).

**IN ADDITION:** Enrichment teaching help is provided in the internet edition of the *Baptist Standard*. Access the **FREE** internet information by checking the *Baptist Standard* website at [www.baptiststandard.com](http://www.baptiststandard.com). Call 214–630–4571 to begin your subscription to the printed edition of the *Baptist Standard*.

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# LESSON ONE

## *Making a Fresh Start*

### FOCAL TEXT

Ezra 1

### BACKGROUND

Ezra 1

### MAIN IDEA

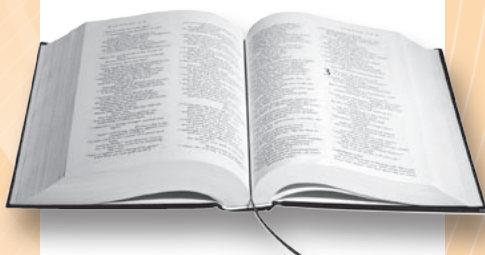
God graciously provides the opportunity to make a fresh start in the midst of desperate and difficult situations people bring on themselves.

### QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What fresh start is needed today?

### TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to explain how the events of Judah's return represented a fresh start and to suggest what they teach about God's offer of a fresh start today



### UNIT 1

## *Ezra: Starting Over*

## BIBLE COMMENTS

### Understanding the Context

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This lesson begins a study based on events in Judah from the initial returns of Jewish exiles in 538 B.C. until the end of Nehemiah's second term as governor about 400 B.C. Bible scholars use the term *post-exilic period* to refer to this little-known but crucial period of Jewish history. The Book of Ezra provides the texts for our first two lessons. Later, beginning in lesson six (unit four), we will study the Book of Nehemiah. The prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi also provide brief glimpses of this era when the very existence and identity of the Jewish people were at risk.

Indeed, the Jewish people had a desperate need for a fresh start. Under difficult and dangerous conditions, God sent Ezra and Nehemiah to lead the Jews back to a covenant relationship and rebuild the land of Judah.

Some historical perspective will help us understand the message of these books. The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 587–586 B.C. This devastating event shattered Jewish hopes for the future and challenged their understanding of God's relationship with Israel. In reprisal for Judah's rebellion, the Babylonians deported several groups of Jews and settled them in various cities near Babylon (see Jeremiah 52; Ezekiel 3:15; the major deportations took place in 597, 586, and 582 B.C.). Thus began the period known as *the exile*.

Conditions in Babylon for the Jewish exiles were not harsh. The Babylonians permitted the Jews to establish their lives in designated cities and towns where, over a period of time, the Jews prospered. However, the exiles longed for an opportunity to return to their ancestral homeland, a sentiment made clear in the mournful cry found in a psalm from this era: "How can we sing the Lord's song In a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:4). Meanwhile the Jews who remained in Judah faced many struggles in a land devastated by two Babylonian invasions, now subjected to foreign domination.

The spiritual crisis spawned by these events prompted Jews to explore crucial questions with great urgency: Why had these disasters

come upon Judah? Had God abandoned the Jews and the promises made to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Did the Jewish people have a future? Could there be a fresh start for the Jewish people?

God sent several prophets whose words helped the Jews understand God's purposes in all these events. These disasters were divine punishment for a people who had forsaken God (see Jer. 7:1–34; 25:1–11; Ezek. 5:1–17).

But this was not the end. Jeremiah and Ezekiel along with the prophecies found in Isaiah 40–55 contain promises that, indeed, God was not through with Israel. The exile would end, the Jews would return to their ancestral homeland, and the temple would be rebuilt (Jer. 29:10–14; 30:1–24; 31:1–25; 33:1–13; Ezek. 37:1–28; 40:1–44:31; Isaiah 40:1–11; 43:1–7; 44:24–28; 49:1–13).

These promises began to bear fruit in 539 B.C., when Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon and established policies allowing people displaced by the Babylonians to return home (see comments on Ezra 1:1–14). Beginning in 538 B.C. groups of Jews, led by Sheshbazar and Zerubbabel, made the dangerous journey from Babylon back to Judah and began the difficult task of reestablishing their lives (see comments on 1:5–11). Those who returned would have to overcome serious obstacles and face discouragement along the way. Encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (lessons 3–5), a new Jerusalem temple was completed and dedicated in 516 B.C., but the spiritual crisis was not yet over. The prophet Malachi, speaking about 480 B.C., castigated Judah for her faithless behavior and neglect of God (lessons 12–14).

By the time Ezra appeared on the scene in 458 B.C., Judah was in desperate need of a fresh start. Ezra was a “scribe skilled in the law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6) who led a group of exiles back from Babylon. Jewish tradition regarded Ezra as a *second Moses*, who called the people into faithful obedience to the covenant made with God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19–20). Ezra read the law to a great national assembly, urging the people to confess their sins and recommit their lives to the ways of God (Nehemiah 8–9; lesson 10). Nehemiah, a royal appointee of the Persian King Artaxerxes I (465–425 B.C.), served two terms as governor of the province of Judah. He rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, thus ensuring the physical safety of the inhabitants, and enacted political and religious reforms that restored integrity to the nation (lessons 6–11).<sup>1</sup>

## Interpreting the Scriptures

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### Time for a New Beginning: The Edict of Cyrus (1:1–4)

**1:1.** *The historical setting.* The Book of Ezra begins in the reign of Cyrus, King of Persia, whose conquests ushered in a new era in ancient history. Cyrus was the king of Anshan, a small kingdom located in the southwest sector of modern Iran. He conquered the Medes in 550 B.C. and embarked on a series of military campaigns that established the Persian Empire. The Kingdom of Lydia, located in western Turkey, fell to Persian armies in 546 B.C., while the city of Babylon surrendered in 539 B.C., bringing to an end the once-mighty power responsible for sacking Jerusalem and deporting Jews into exile. Before he died in 530 B.C., Cyrus created the largest empire yet seen.

From the perspective of Ezra 1:1, the first year of Cyrus was 539 B.C., the year Cyrus conquered Babylon. This event triggered the all-important edict that permitted the Jewish exiles to return home. The conquests of Cyrus served God's purposes and had a direct impact on the Jews. Isaiah describes Cyrus as God's "anointed" (Isa. 45:1), the word that in Hebrew gives us the term *messiah*. In Isaiah 45:1, it conveys the idea of one who serves God's in a particular way. This is the only time in the Bible where the term is used of a Gentile.

The statement that God "stirred up the spirit of Cyrus" (Ezra 1:1) connects the historical events with a God's providential plan. By using Cyrus to bring an end to Babylonian power, God created the historical conditions by which the Jews could return to their homeland, restore Jerusalem, and rebuild the temple (Isa. 44:28). According to the writer, these events fulfilled words spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, generally taken to refer to Jeremiah's prophecy that seventy years of Babylonian captivity would elapse before God would permit the Jews to return from exile (Jer. 25:11; 29:10; see also 2 Chronicles 36:21).

Most likely we should understand the number *seventy*, a perfect number, as a way of expressing the idea that in God's providence the days of divine punishment for Judah were complete. God was not finished with Israel. Indeed, a new era was dawning just as the prophets had promised. Doubt and despair now gave way to hope as God opened the way for a new beginning, using Cyrus as his instrument.

**1:2–4.** *A royal decree.* These verses contain an edict issued by Cyrus the Great about 538 B.C. The edict is referenced in two other places in the Bible, Ezra 6:2–5 and 2 Chronicles 36:22–23. The slight variations of wording between the three versions of the decree probably reflect the variety of audiences and usages for which the decree was intended. Our passage seems to be a royal proclamation intended to be read in Jewish population centers, while the Ezra 6 version was an official copy placed in the royal archives in Ecbatana—the former capital of the Median Empire and an important Persian administrative center.

The edict reflects the general policies enacted by Cyrus the Great found in surviving royal documents like the famous Cyrus Cylinder.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the Babylonians who deported rebellious people and often despoiled local temples, Cyrus implemented more humane policies, allowing people groups displaced under Babylonian rule to return home. He also provided royal assistance to restore temples (see Ezra 6:4). By implementing these policies Cyrus hoped to gain the support and obedience of the local populations throughout his massive empire. We will see that the edict afforded the same privileges to the Jews.

In 1:2, Cyrus is identified as “king of Persia,” an unusual phrase not used in Persian royal titles. The use of the title suggests that the decree was intended for a Jewish audience. Cyrus claimed that “the LORD, the God of Heaven” prompted him to make the decree. The Jews used this title for God frequently after the time of the exile, perhaps as a way to emphasize God’s universal scope. God was the God not only of Israel but also of the entire world.

In 1:3–4, the edict granted two privileges to the exiles: (1) rebuilding the temple and (2) returning to their ancestral homeland. According to Cyrus, God appointed him to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (1:2–3). We learn elsewhere that Cyrus purchased some of the materials to rebuild the temple out of the royal treasury (6:4). Cyrus also permitted exiled Jews and their descendants to return to Judah and assist with the project. This privilege extended to Jews in all parts of the empire, not just Babylon (1:4).

Not all the Jews in exile would choose to make the long and difficult trip back to Judah. According to the edict, those who chose to stay should support the exiles who returned home by supplying financial support, cattle, and other goods for the return, in addition to making a freewill offering for the temple (1:4).

### Returning Home (1:5–11)

**1:5.** Just as God had prompted (“stirred up”) Cyrus to issue the edict, so now God worked in the hearts of those who first returned to Judah. The writer emphasized that these events originated in God’s divine plan, not mere human motivation. Those who returned came from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the two tribes that formed the basis of the Southern kingdom before the exile. Priests and Levites joined the “heads of father’s households,” a reference to the lay leaders of the extended families that formed the basic social units of Israelite society. Significantly both lay people and clergy made the journey home.

**1:6.** “All those about them” refers to Gentile neighbors who also contributed to the returning exiles. They provided precious metals, cattle, goods, and other valuables as a freewill offering. Many commentators note the close parallel between these actions and the actions of the Egyptians who gave the departing Israelites similar articles at the time of the Exodus (Exodus 3:21–22; 11:2; 12:35–36). The writer presents the return to Judah as a *second Exodus*, a new beginning for the Jewish people.

**1:7–11.** These verses tell of the return of the vessels used in the temple. The Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar plundered the temple in 597 and 586 B.C., stripping the temple of the gold, silver, and bronze vessels used in worship, taking them as spoils of war (2 Kings 24:14–25:15; 2 Chron. 36:6–10). Nebuchadnezzar kept these vessels in a pagan Babylonian temple as a symbol of the superiority of Babylon’s gods to the God of the Jews (2 Chron. 36:7). Belshazzar used these vessels at the banquet when he saw the mysterious finger on the night before Cyrus conquered Babylon (Daniel 5:2–3).

Cyrus presented the temple vessels to Sheshbazzar as a gift to be returned to the temple in Jerusalem. Although Sheshbazzar led the first group of exiles back to Judah, we know little about him. Scholars once believed the title “prince of Judah” meant that Sheshbazzar descended from the line of David. This idea is no longer widely held. Ezra 5:13–16 tells us that Cyrus appointed Sheshbazzar a governor—presumably of Judah—and that he laid the foundation of the temple. We do not know Sheshbazzar’s fate. He disappears from the scene some time prior to the arrival of Zerubbabel sometime after 538/537 B.C. (see further in lesson 2).



Verses 9–11 provide a partial description of the 5,400 vessels commended into Sheshbazzar's safe-keeping for the journey. The objects included various utensils used in the service of the temple (bowls, plates, perhaps chalices; other texts mention bronze snuffers and shovels that were part of the temple rituals). The return of these vessels must have generated great hope among the exiles. The temple would be rebuilt and furnished with the sacred vessels looted from the temple decades earlier. A new beginning for the Jewish community was at hand while the long night of despair faded into the past. God was indeed faithful to his promises.

### Focusing on the Meaning

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The destruction of Jerusalem followed by the exile of many Jews sent into Babylonian captivity had a profound impact on the Jews. Their basic identity as a people of God had been shaken; hopes for the future vanished almost overnight. Where was God in all the destruction? Had God abandoned Judah? Were the gods of Babylon stronger than the God of Israel? These questions haunted the exiles in the aftermath of the national tragedy.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel interpreted these events as the just punishment of God caused by Judah's repeated violations of the covenant made with God at Mount Sinai. Judah's unfaithfulness to God was the root of the problem. As the Jews slowly acknowledged this fact, the next question was, *Does Judah have a future?*

According to the prophets, Judah did have a future, because God keeps his promises. He is a merciful and gracious God who remains faithful to his purpose to extend life to all people (Genesis 12:1–3). The Jews would return to the land, rebuild the temple, and once again enjoy the blessings of God. God was already at work in the heart of Cyrus the Great to make the return to the land possible. The Edict of Cyrus provided the opportunity of a fresh start for the Jewish people.

Often we find our lives threatened by difficult, even desperate, situations. Sometimes the circumstances are of our own making, as it was with Judah. We all need a fresh start in life at one time or another. Like Nicodemus in his visit with Jesus, we ask the wistful question, *Is it possible to start all over again?* (John 3:4). As Judah discovered, God's answer is a definitive *yes, you can*.

By trusting in God's goodness we understand that God wants the very best for our lives. Faithful obedience to God's will always leads to life. By trusting in God's grace when we have failed, we know that God is always ready to give us a fresh start, even when times are desperate and we really do not deserve one. God is a God of new beginnings. God is in the recycling business for all of those who seek him, opening new doors to the future.

## TEACHING PLANS

### Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

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#### Connect with Life

1. Pray that God will show members what fresh starts they need to make in their lives. If available, bring and display a Fresh Start® laundry detergent bottle or a picture of one.
2. Write the phrase *FRESH START* on the board. Ask, *What does making a fresh start mean to you?* Ask several members to share an experience of a fresh start they have experienced in their lives.
3. Inform members that the Bible study this quarter includes the Books of Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, Nehemiah, and Malachi. Point out that these books deal with matters of restoring the Jewish nation's worship in the temple and calling the people to live in faithfulness to God's covenant, that is, making a fresh start. Summarize, or enlist a member in advance to summarize, "Introducing Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, Nehemiah, Malachi: Restoring the Future" and the unit introduction to Ezra in the *Study Guide*. Refer to the chart, "Chronological Sketch of the Events in Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, Nehemiah, Malachi" in the *Study Guide*. Encourage students to refer to this chart as they study the Bible lessons in this issue.

4. State that today's study will center on the events of Judah's return from captivity in Babylon to Jerusalem to make a fresh start. Draw attention to the Main Idea and the Study Aim for this lesson in the *Study Guide*. Emphasize that Judah's experience of making a fresh start can encourage others to do the same. Encourage members to think about what fresh starts they may need to make in their lives.

### Guide Bible Study

5. Invite a member to read Ezra 1:1–4. Present a short lecture on this passage using the material from the *Study Guide* and “Bible Comments” in this *Teaching Guide*. Point out that the Book of Ezra begins where 2 Chronicles ends. Notice it was God who moved the heart of the non-Jewish King Cyrus of Persia to make his proclamation. Ask, *What has God moved you to do in the past that might be similar to this?* Allow time for members to share their experiences.
6. Invite members to share information on relocation experiences they have had. Ask, *What prompted you to make the move? What problems and challenges did you face as you relocated? Did you meet new friends who aided you in your move? In what ways did God confirm to you that this was his will for your life?*
7. Enlist a member to read Ezra 1:5–11. Recall that God moved the heart of Cyrus in verse 1 to write his proclamation and in verse 5 God also moved the hearts of those God called back to Jerusalem. Point out that the Jews not returning to Jerusalem were inspired to contribute silver, gold, livestock, and other valuable items for their return. Cyrus returned the temple articles that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple.
8. Ask, *Why do you think some of the Jews did not choose to go back to Jerusalem?* (Ideas: Perhaps the trip of nearly 1,000 miles would be too rugged for some who had health problems or who were aged. Some may not have wanted to go back to a destroyed city to rebuild it.) Comment that today many people who formerly lived along the Gulf coast have relocated to other areas because of the hurricanes. Still others had no desire to leave and were eager to return. These

verses do not tell us why some Jews decided to stay. Note again that many who did not return to Jerusalem contributed in significant ways to those who did return. Comment that although all are not able to go on a church's mission trip, the monetary and prayer support of those who do not go is important.

### Encourage Application

9. Ask, *How do you think the Jews felt about the decree of Cyrus that they could return?* Guide the conversation so that the class will see that it offered the wonderful opportunity of a fresh start. Continue by asking, *What experiences have you or your family faced that required a fresh start? In what ways did your faith in God affect your response to that challenge?*
10. State, *Let's think about our own opportunities for making a fresh start now.* Encourage members to talk together with the people next to them, using the following questions for guidance: *What are some areas in which you think a fresh start is needed in our lives? Does our church need a fresh start in some area? Do we need new Sunday School classes or departments because of new growth? Do we need to consider a new ministry emphasis area for single adults, senior adults, or adults with special needs? Do young families need day care or after school care? Do we need to consider local, state, regional, or international mission opportunities?*
11. Pray that class members will be open to God's leading for "fresh starts."

### Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions

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#### Connect with Life

1. Beginning by asking the class whether anyone has seen the television show *Extreme Makeover*. Invite comments about what the show is about. (Families are given new custom-built homes to meet their specific family needs. This gives these families a fresh start.)

Point out that all of us need a fresh start at times in life. This certainly was true for Judah at this stage in its history.

2. Inform the class that this study will be of the Books of Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, Nehemiah, and Malachi. Use information from “Restoring the Future?” in “Introducing Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, Nehemiah, Malachi: Restoring the Future” in the *Study Guide* to describe the historical setting for this study. Point out that this study will begin with the Book of Ezra as Judah returns to Jerusalem and makes a fresh start. Then summarize the unit introduction to the Book of Ezra in the *Study Guide*. Refer to the chart, “Chronological Sketch of the Events in Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, Nehemiah, Malachi” in the *Study Guide*.
3. Write this session’s title, “Making a Fresh Start,” on the board. Ask, *What does making a fresh start mean to you?* Allow time for members to respond. Encourage responses by asking, *Can you give an example of a fresh start you made in your own life?* (Some may suggest becoming a Christian, rededicating one’s life to Christ, marrying, adjusting to a death in the family, taking a new job, moving to another city, or retiring.)

### Guide Bible Study

4. Refer to the Main Idea, Study Aim, and Question to Explore in the *Study Guide*.
5. Assist members to find the Book of Ezra in their Bibles by telling them it is the book immediately following 2 Chronicles. Point out that Ezra begins where 2 Chronicles ends.
6. Read Ezra 1:1–4. Use the information in the *Study Guide* and “Bible Comments” in the *Teaching Guide* to explain this passage. Ask, *Who prompted Cyrus to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple?* (God moved Cyrus to make this proclamation, 1:1–2.) Note that Cyrus allowed any Jew who wanted to return to Jerusalem to do so and to participate in the rebuilding of the temple. Both Cyrus and others provided the necessary funds. Ask, *What lessons can we take from God’s using non-Jewish people to accomplish a purpose for the Jews?*

7. Read Ezra 1:5. Note that as God moved the heart of Cyrus to make his proclamation, God also moved the heart of those God wanted to return to Jerusalem. Encourage members to think about ways God has moved their hearts to do something. Allow time for members to respond.
8. Enlist a member to read Ezra 1:6–11. Refer to the small article, “The Temple Vessels,” in the *Study Guide*. Notice that 5,400 gold and silver objects were being returned for temple use.

### Encourage Application

9. Refer to “Case Study” in the *Study Guide*. Read the case study and call for suggestions.
10. Ask, *What are some things this passage of Scripture suggests to you about making a fresh start?*
11. Point out that making a fresh start is exciting, but it also requires courage, ingenuity, and energy. Ask, *What resources do you feel God has made available to enable us to begin again after some loss or difficulty?* Allow class members to share ways in which these resources have benefited you or someone in your family.
12. Close in prayer, asking that class members be open to God’s leading for making a fresh starts.

### NOTES

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1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in the lessons on Ezra and Nehemiah are from the New American Standard Bible (1995 edition).
2. See [www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight\\_objects/me/c/cyrus\\_cylinder.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/me/c/cyrus_cylinder.aspx) (accessed 10/24/08).