

who gave them permission)

**(3) How did they respond?**

(Cyrus the Great had okayed the project)

**(4) What did the authorities do?**  
(Wrote Darius about it and asked his decision)

- Have someone read aloud Ezra 6:1-22 while the class listens for Darius' decision (don't interfere with work; pay their expenses), and the ultimate outcome (temple finished, dedicated; Passover celebrated).

 **Wrapping It Up**

- **The new beginning in Jerusalem reminds us that God provides us opportunities for spiritual renewal. Perhaps you are at a point in your life where you feel a need to recommit yourself to God. Let me encourage you to do so today.**

- Lead the class in a closing prayer.



**Faith at Home**

Lead family members to discuss things they would like to "do over" (handle in a different way) if only they could. Then say, "Although we can't go back and do over the things in our lives we regret, we can let them impact how we live in the future." Ask family members to tell how they could let specific past mistakes help them as they move forward.

 **Making It Personal**

*Small group discussion*

- Have members get into small groups of three to five persons.
- Ask each group to discuss for five minutes: What can we learn from today's study about staying with a God-given task despite opposition and problems?
- After five minutes, ask each group to share some highlights of its discussion with the rest of the class.

# Teacher's Toolbox

*Getting your class into God's Word  
and God's Word into your class*

**ExcitingBibleStudy.com**

**Bible Series**

**Ezra 1-6**

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Prepared by David Williams

PO Box 628, Liberty, TX 77575 972-814-5378

[davidwilliams@ExcitingBibleStudy.com](mailto:davidwilliams@ExcitingBibleStudy.com)

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**HOW TO USE TEACHER'S TOOLBOX:** Make a four-page folded teacher's leaflet from the first two sheets by printing two-sided (or by putting the blank sides together). The other two sheets are for duplicating, displaying, distributing, or otherwise using as called for in the lesson plan.



**Faith at Home** – A specific application of today's Bible passage to family life, to be used for individual reflection, family discussion, or class activity.



**Getting Started**

*Personal sharing*

- **Has anybody ever given you a fresh start, a new beginning? Think of a situation in which you were allowed a "do over" in life. Tell the person next to you about that experience.**
- Allow three or four minutes for sharing. Then let two or three volunteers share with the whole class.
- **The chance to start over may be just what we need at some point in our lives. In fact, it may be just what you need right now. As we begin our study of how the Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem to start over, we need to remember that God gives us opportunities to be spiritually renewed. It's up to us to decide how we will use those opportunities.**
- Tell the class that the Old Testament books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther relate to the time of the Exile, or Captivity, between the defeat of

Jerusalem and the return of the Jewish people to their homeland.

## Exploring God's Word

### Choral reading

- Give each person a copy of the choral reading (duplicate Item 1), based on Ezra 1–3. Have members count off in three's (one, two, three; one, two...). Explain that all the "one's" will read the "Group 1" lines in unison, and so forth.
- Have Group 1 begin the reading.

### Choral Reading

**GROUP 1:** In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia,

**GROUP 2:** In order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah,

**GROUP 3:** The Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing.

**GROUP 1:** This is what Cyrus king of Persia says.

**GROUP 2:** The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem.

**GROUP 3:** When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled as one man in Jerusalem.

**GROUP 1:** Then Jeshua son of Jozadak

**GROUP 2:** And his fellow priests

**GROUP 3:** And Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel

**GROUP 2:** And his associates

**GROUP 1:** Began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses the man of God.

**GROUP 3:** On the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord, though the foundation of the Lord's temple had not yet been laid.

**GROUP 1:** Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and gave food and drink and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre, so that they would bring cedar logs by sea from Lebanon to Joppa, as authorized by Cyrus king of Persia.

**GROUP 2:** When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord,

**GROUP 1:** The priests in their vestments and with trumpets,

**GROUP 3:** And the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals,

**GROUP 2:** Took their places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David king of Israel.

**GROUP 1:** But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid,

**GROUP 3:** While many others shouted for joy.

### Question and answer

- Have someone read aloud Ezra 1:1-6. Let a volunteer identify the time of the event on the time line (538 B.C.)

- **What did Cyrus say God wanted him to do?** (build a temple for God in Jerusalem)

- **Which Jewish captives did Cyrus allow to return to Jerusalem?** (family heads of Judah and Benjamin, priests and Levites)

- **What did those staying behind do to help?** (gave offerings, gold, goods, livestock and valuable gifts)
- Have someone read aloud Ezra 1:7-11.

- **What items did Cyrus contribute to the project?** (articles Nebuchadnezzar had taken away from Solomon's temple earlier)

- Have someone read aloud Ezra 3:1-6.

- **What was the first thing the returning exiles did?** (rebuild the altar, reinstate the sacrificial system, and begin celebrating the Jewish feasts)

- Have someone read aloud Ezra 3:7-12.

- **How did the people respond when the foundation of the temple was laid?** (praised God, shouted with joy, wept)

### Understanding chronology

- Give each person a copy of Item 2, a chart explaining the chronology of Ezra 4–6. Walk through it

to help them understand the time frames covered by various parts of the passage.

### Surveying the passage

- **Not everyone was happy to have the Jews back home rebuilding the wall.**

- Have someone read aloud Ezra 4:1-5.

- **Why did the Jews refuse the Samaritans' help?** (They were descended from their rivals, the Northern Kingdom; they had intermarried with Assyrians transplanted to Palestine; they had begun worshiping foreign gods in addition to the Lord)

- Use information from the chronology chart on the back of this sheet to explain how Ezra "flashes forward" in 4:6-23 before continuing his story of opposition to rebuilding the temple.

- Have someone read the passage aloud.

- Use the chronology chart to explain Ezra is now back to his original story.

- Have someone read aloud Ezra 4:24–5:17 as the rest of the class listens for the answers to these questions (write them on the chalkboard):

- (1) **Why did the Jews resume work on the temple?** (Haggai and Zechariah's prophetic challenge)

- (2) **Why were they questioned by authorities?** (wanted to know

# Choral Reading

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<b>Passage</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Persian King</b>	<b>Summary</b>
4:1-4	537 B.C.	Cyrus	Returning exiles refuse Samaritan offer of help in rebuilding the temple
4:5, 24	537-520 B.C.	Cyrus, Cambyses II, Darius I	Samaritans frustrate Jewish efforts to rebuild the temple. Building comes to a halt.
5:1— 6:12	520 B.C.	Darius I	Haggai and Zechariah incite the people to start rebuilding again. Officials question their authorization to build and are told they have a decree from Cyrus. When they report this information to Darius, he researches and finds it to be true. Darius issues a decree granting the Jews freedom from interference in their project. He also commands that the expenses of the project be paid from the royal treasury.
6:13-22	516 B.C.	Darius I	Temple completed and dedicated. Passover celebrated.
4:6	486 B.C.	Xerxes I (Ahasuerus)	(This passage and the next one are out of order chronologically, but inserted here because they relate to opposition faced by the Jews in their re-establishment in Jerusalem.) Samaritans lodge accusation against the Jews. Results in a dangerous time for them. Xerxes once ordered all Jews destroyed, but later recanted. The Book of Esther tells this story.
4:7-23	465-458 B.C.	Artaxerxes I	King is warned by spies/officials that the rebuilding of the Jerusalem wall will cause him to suffer financial loss, be dishonored, and lose part of his kingdom. He orders the work stopped. In 458 B.C., he changes his position and endorses Ezra's trip to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:1-28). Then, in 445 B.C., he gives Nehemiah permission to go rebuild the walls (Nehemiah 2:1-10).