

*Ezra and
Haggai
Leader Guide*
(NASB and ESV)

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

Ezra and Haggai Leader Guide (NASB and ESV)

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USING LEADER GUIDES

Leader Guides are intended for you, the leader, to guide your Precept Upon Precept® and In & Out® discussions. They are designed to help you reason through the content of the lessons and to ensure you have understood what your group should have learned from their study. The guides offer effective plans for leading discussions.

The Holy Spirit is your guide as you prepare. He is the one who knows what your group needs to apply to their lives. Pray for them as they study and for yourself as you prepare to lead the discussion.

These guides can be used for either the NASB or the ESV edition of the courses. ESV words follow the NASB after a slash / or are set off with parentheses.

Leader Guides include the following:

- Lesson emphasis
- A logical order for the discussion
- Discussion questions
- Suggested visual aid(s)

Practical tips for using the Leader Guide:

- **Don't simply "do" the lesson.**
Stay with the lesson until you have a good understanding of it. This will give you a better grasp of how the Leader Guide takes you through the lesson.
- **You don't have to ask every question in the guide.**
Often one question will be covered while discussing another question so there is no reason to ask it. Your goal is not to ask every question, but to ask enough questions to make sure your group understood the lesson and to help them apply the truths to their lives.

Using the Leader Guide with In & Out


When your entire group uses In & Out

Compare an In & Out lesson with the Leader Guide. Use what relates to the In & Out lesson as a guide for the discussion. Don't teach what's not in In & Out lessons. Remember your goal in the discussion is for your group to discuss what they've learned, not for you to lecture on what you learned.

For groups studying both Precept Upon Precept and In & Out

Use the Leader Guides as designed for PUP, knowing that the In & Out assignments will be covered in the discussion. Make a note in the Leader Guide of what is not in the In & Out.

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**EZRA / HAGGAI
LEADER GUIDE
Lesson 1**

Lesson emphasis

Ezra 1–3

NOTE: Tell your group to get out “The Times of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther” chart, the map, the “Ezra at a Glance” chart, and the “Feasts of Israel” chart before you begin your discussion.

HISTORICAL SETTING / BACKGROUND

How does Ezra begin?

Cyrus’s first year as king of Persia, to fulfill the Lord’s word through Jeremiah

Tell your group to look at “The Times of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther” chart as a visual aid for this part of your discussion.

What were the events in Israel’s history which led to Ezra 1:1? Ask what your group learned from the cross-references.

2 Chronicles 36:5-23

The Lord brought King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon against His people in Jerusalem.

The kings of Judah were evil, and the priests and people were unfaithful to the Lord.

They defiled / polluted His house, His temple in Jerusalem.

They mocked the prophets like Jeremiah whom the Lord sent to them.

Then He sent His wrath in the form of the Chaldeans—the Babylonians.

The people were killed or taken captive to Babylon.

The temple was destroyed and its holy articles / vessels taken.

Jeremiah 25:1-14 and 29:10-14

The Lord said that Judah was to be exiled in Babylon for seventy years. When the seventy years were completed, the Lord would bring them back to their own land.

Daniel 5:17–6:3, 28

Daniel, who was taken captive in the first exile of Jerusalem, prophesied in Babylon to the kings of Babylon. He was there for the whole seventy years.

The last king of Babylon was Belshazzar. Daniel told him the Medes and Persians were to take over his kingdom. It happened as he said.

Isaiah 44:24–45:13

The Lord, through Isaiah, said that Cyrus was to rebuild the city and lay the foundation of His temple in Jerusalem.

God named Cyrus more than 100 years before he was born. He called him by name even before the Babylonians took Jerusalem captive.

EZRA 1

Verses 1-4

When did the events of this chapter take place?

In Cyrus's first year as King of Persia, 539–538 B.C.
The end of the seventy years exile in Babylon
The time shortly after Daniel 6

What happened in verses 1-4?

Cyrus sent a written proclamation throughout his kingdom for those of Judah to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Lord's temple there.

Tell your group to look at the map as a visual aid here.

Why did Cyrus send the proclamation?

The Lord stirred up his spirit to do His will.

He used a pagan king to fulfill His Word.

At this point, you can ask what your group learned about the Lord in the passages you've discussed. Give time for application discussion as well.

There is a list about the Lord at the end of this lesson's guide which you can use as an example of a visual aid for this discussion. Add to the list as you discuss each chapter.

What else do verses 1-4 say about the Lord?

He was in the process of keeping, fulfilling, His promises in His Word through Jeremiah.

He stirred Cyrus's spirit to make the proclamation.

The God of heaven gave Cyrus all the kingdoms of the earth. Isaiah prophesied this. He appointed Cyrus to rebuild His house in Jerusalem.

He's the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem.

What happened in verses 5-11?

The Lord also stirred up the peoples' spirits to return to Jerusalem.

The heads of Judah and Benjamin
—the two tribes of the Kingdom of Judah

The priests and Levites
—those who ministered in the temple

And the people

They were encouraged to return by the people about them, with gifts and offerings for their journey and the rebuilding.

Verse 4 might include the Persians and Jews or only the Jews. Either might have given silver and gold, as with the Egyptians at the Exodus. But a freewill offering seems to indicate a Jewish offering at God's temple.

King Cyrus sent the temple articles taken by Nebuchadnezzar with the prince of Judah Sheshbazzar.

Give time for discussion about God stirring up spirits to do His will.

To end your discussion of Ezra 1, ask your group how they summarized this chapter on their At a Glance chart.

God stirred spirits to return and rebuild His house in Jerusalem

EZRA 2

What is this chapter about?

This is a list of those who returned to the cities of Judah.

49,897 total went with the leaders named in verse 2.

Families—verses 3-20

Cities—verses 21-35

Priests—verses 36-39

Levites—verses 40-42

Temple servants—verses 43-54

The king's servants (ESV—sons of Solomon's servants)—verses 55-57

Those with no evidence that they belonged to Israel—verses 59-63

What are verses 68-70 about?

After arriving in Jerusalem, some of the family heads gave offerings to restore / erect the Lord's house on its foundation / site.

They lived in their own cities / towns in Judah, not all in Jerusalem.

Ask your group what they noted on their Ezra at a Glance chart as a theme for this chapter.

Those who returned to Judah and Jerusalem

EZRA 3

Verses 1-3

What are the main points?

In the 7th month of the year, after the people returned to Judah, they gathered in Jerusalem.

Jeshua and Zerubbabel and their brothers (ESV—fellow priests and kinsmen) built the altar to burn sacrifices and offerings to the Lord.

Compare these two men with the leaders named in 2:2.

The people were terrified of (ESV—fear was on them because of) the other people living in the land around them.

You might ask your group if they have been in a situation like that and what they did?

What happened in verses 4-7?

They celebrated the Feast of Booths in the 7th month

How is the Feast of Booths described in Leviticus 23:39-44? Tell your group to look at “The Feasts of Israel” chart as a visual aid for this part of your discussion.

On the 15th day of the 7th month all Israel was to celebrate this feast for eight days. It was to be celebrated every year.

They made booths out of foliage / fruit, branches and boughs of trees.

It's a feast of rejoicing before the Lord.

What were the people to remember as they celebrated this feast? What was the cause for rejoicing? What did it signify?

The Lord brought them out of slavery, captivity, in Egypt.

They lived in booths in the wilderness after He led them out of Egypt.

Since they had just come out of captivity to Babylon, they must have been overjoyed to celebrate this feast before their God. He's the God of Israel.

What happened after the feast?

They continued to offer on the altar all the offerings connected with all the festivals and new moons.

It was a reminder of the Lord with them in their land.

Then they began to rebuild the Lord's house.

Money was given to the masons and carpenters.

Goods were traded with the Sidonians and Tyrians for cedar from Lebanon.
Locate these places on the map.

Verses 8-9

What is the time of verse 8?

2nd year, 2nd month

This was about seven months after the Feast of Booths in verses 4-6.

Who is named in verse 8? Compare the names in verse 8 with the leaders in 2:2 and 3:2.

It seems that Zerubbabel and Jeshua were the leaders.

They appointed the Levites to oversee / supervise the work on the temple.

What did the leaders and the people do?

They laid the foundation of the temple, the Lord's house.

Verses 10-11

Who did what in these verses? How does this relate to 2:36-42?

The priests and Levites praised the Lord with music when the foundation was laid. They led the people in praise.

Gave thanks

God's lovingkindness / steadfast love is on Israel forever

He didn't leave them but kept His promises to them for return.

He does the same now—He keeps His promises in His Word.

What was the reaction in verses 12-13?

While most of the people shouted loudly for joy, the old men who had seen the previous house wept—the ones who had lived through the seventy years of captivity.

How do Psalm 137:1-6 and Psalm 126 relate to this?

When the people of Judah were in Babylon, they wept when they remembered Zion—Jerusalem. They longed for their own land.

They couldn't sing for joy in captivity.

Psalm 126 was after the return.

They came back with joyful shouting, saying, “The Lord has done great things for us.”

Ask what your group noted as a possible theme for this chapter on their Ezra at a Glance chart.

They celebrated the Feast of Booths, laid foundation of Lord's house

How does Proverbs 21:1 relate to Ezra 1–3?

Ezra is a demonstration of what Proverbs says.

How does this relate to the everyday lives and trials of the people in your group?

For application you might end with a discussion of this verse and the events of Ezra 1–3.

The LORD

Fulfilled His word

Stirred Cyrus's spirit and the people's

God of heaven

Gave Cyrus kingdoms, appointed him to build His house

God of Israel in Jerusalem

Praise and give thanks

**EZRA / HAGGAI
LEADER GUIDE
Lesson 2**

Lesson emphasis

- Ezra 4–6

REVIEW

To begin this discussion, ask what your group remembers from the first lesson about the historical setting leading up to Ezra.

The chart “The Times of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther” is a good visual aid for this part of your discussion.

Israel had turned from the Lord God to worship other gods.
God sent word through His prophets that judgment was coming—Babylon.

He also told of restoration after the Babylonians took Judah captive.

The Lord named Cyrus, the Persian king, before Persia was a major kingdom, over 100 years before he was born, and at least 75 years before Judah was exiled.

After 70 years of Babylonian captivity, they started returning to Judah and Jerusalem.

What is Ezra 1–3 about? Direct them to look at their At a Glance charts for this.

Ezra 1 God stirred spirits to return and rebuild His house in Jerusalem

Ezra 2 The list of those who returned to Judah and Jerusalem

Ezra 3 They celebrated the Feast of Booths, laid foundation of Lord’s house

It was the second year after their return.

Zerubbabel and Jeshua were the leaders.

EZRA 4

Verses 1-3

When do these verses take place and what happened?

When the enemies / adversaries heard about the returnees building the Lord’s temple, they asked if they could build with them.

They said they were also seeking / worshiping God and had been sacrificing to the Lord since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria. He was the king who had brought them there.

NOTE: Esarhaddon was Sennacherib's son. He settled people in Israel about 140 years before this time in Ezra.

Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the heads responded that the enemies had nothing in common / to do with them. And they were excluded.

As a visual aid for this part of your discussion, tell your group to look at the chart “The Times of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.”

Who were the enemies / adversaries? Where did they live?

They were the people Esarhaddon king of Assyria brought to live in the land of Israel.

How does 2 Kings 17:21-41 compare with this?

Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel—after their split from the southern kingdom of Judah—introduced the people of God to idol worship.

Because of their continued idol worship, God brought Assyria against them. Israel was exiled to Assyria, and people from other nations were brought to live in the area surrounding Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

These people brought their own gods with them to Israel's land, but they also were trained to worship the Lord.

They tried to mix worship of the true and living God with the false.

That resulted in their being enemies / adversaries of those who truly worshiped the Lord.

You might ask your group if that still happens now.

There is only the one true God. He alone is to be worshiped.

Lead your discussion back to Ezra 4:4-5.

What did the enemies do?

The people of the land, the enemies, discouraged and frightened them from building. They hired / bribed counselors to frustrate Judah's counsel / purpose the whole time Cyrus was king of Persia.

You might ask your group if their enemies do that to them.

What happened in verse 6? When?

The enemies wrote an accusation about the Jews to the reigning Persian kings.

The first was Ahasuerus.

NOTE: He was king of Persia about 45 years after Cyrus. He was also known by “Xerxes.” This Persian king was Esther’s husband.

What are verses 7-23 about? When did this take place?

Although the time jumped ahead to Artaxerxes’ reign, about 70 years after the time when the temple rebuilding stopped during Cyrus’s reign, the theme is the same—opposition to God’s people and His will.

The letter to Artaxerxes opposed rebuilding the city of Jerusalem and its walls.

It called Jerusalem a rebellious city which didn’t pay tribute to foreign kings in the past and incited revolt / stirred up sedition against them. It said that was why it was laid waste.

What did the letter from the king say in verses 17-23? And what was the result?

Even the pagan kings had records of Jerusalem’s history—its greatness and its decline.

Artaxerxes issued a decree that the city not be rebuilt.
The work was stopped by force.

What was the time of verse 24?

This was when the work on the temple was stopped in Cyrus’s reign.
The work stopped until the second year of Darius king of Persia.
That was about 14 years.

NOTE: On the chart “The Times of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther” there are two kings named Darius. The first was Darius the Mede who reigned at the same time as Cyrus of Persia. The second king named Darius was the Persian king in Ezra 4. Verse 24 states it was the second year of his reign—about 14 years after the work stopped.

Why might verses 6-23 be included in this chapter?

There were ongoing problems with the people of the land, even after this time.

Ask your group what they noted on their At a Glance chart as a possible theme for this chapter.

Enemies’ / Adversaries’ letters; building stopped

EZRA 5

Verses 1-2

Who was mentioned by name? What did they do?

Prophets: Haggai and Zechariah
Prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem
Supported them

Leaders: Zerubbabel and Jeshua
Began to rebuild God's house

What are verses 3-5 about?

Tattenai, the governor beyond the river and his colleagues asked who issued a decree for the Jews to rebuild the temple. They wrote a report about this work to Darius.

But God's eye was on the elders of Judah, and they didn't stop the work again. They worked while they waited on the reply from the king.

What are verses 6-17?

This is the report sent to King Darius about the work on the Lord's house.

You might ask your group what they learned about the Lord from this report. You can also list their insights as a visual aid for this part of your discussion.

The great God, the God of heaven and earth
In His wrath / anger He destroyed His temple and deported / carried away His people.

Who was mentioned again by name in verses 13-16?

Sheshbazzar, appointed governor by King Cyrus, was given the utensils / vessels for the Lord's house. Cyrus sent him to Jerusalem to put the utensils / vessels in the temple. Ezra 1:8-11 says that he was the prince of Judah.

That Sheshbazzar also laid the foundations of the house.

NOTE: Ezra 5:13 says, "king of Babylon," referring to King Cyrus of Persia. It seems that when a king conquered a previous kingdom, he might also be referred to as king of that kingdom. This is also true of Ezra 6:22 when Darius king of Persia (Ezra 6:1, 8) is referred to as "king of Assyria."

Tell your group to look at their At a Glance chart. What's a possible theme for Ezra 5?

Prophets supported Judah, rebuilding began; Tattenai's letter to King Darius

EZRA 6

Verses 1-5

How does this chapter continue the events from Ezra 5?

Darius issued a decree to search the archives.

They found Cyrus's decree to rebuild God's house, and Darius sent a decree to finish it.

The size of the temple, 60 x 60 cubits—approximately 90 feet x 90 feet

The cost paid by Darius's royal treasury

Temple utensils / vessels returned from Babylon to Jerusalem

What do the cross-references in Daniel and Esther say about a Persian king's decree?

Daniel 6:8 and Esther 8:8

A Persian king's decree was irrevocable.

Verses 6-12

What did the decree from Darius say?

Tattenai, governor of province and colleagues / associates keep away from the work

Let the governor of the Jews, Sheshbazzar—5:14, and the elders rebuild

Full cost paid from royal treasury, from taxes / tribute in provinces and provide for offerings

Request to pray for king's life and his sons

Violation of edict resulted in being impaled

The God of heaven caused His name to dwell in Jerusalem

What are verses 13-15 about?

The decree / word was carried out with diligence.

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah spoke to the people, and the house was completed / finished on the 3rd of Adar in Darius's 6th year.

What happened in verses 16-18?

They celebrated the temple dedication with joy.

The priests and Levites were appointed for temple service as directed by Moses in the Law.

Compare this with 2 Chronicles 7:1-5 and the dedication of the first temple.

The glory of the Lord filled the house and fire from heaven consumed the sacrifices in Solomon's day. They offered thousands of animals to the Lord.

There is no mention of the Lord's glory in Ezra 6, and the sacrifices were only a few hundred.

But there was still joy in doing the Lord's will.

NOTE: If any of your group read Exodus 12:1-8, then ask what they learned about Passover and Unleavened Bread Feasts when discussing the answers to the next question.

Lead your discussion back to Ezra 6.

What happened next in verses 19-22?

Refer your group to the chart in the Appendix "The Feasts of Israel" as a visual aid.

The returned exiles celebrated the Passover in the first month.

They were purified, separated from the impurity / uncleanness of the nations / peoples, to seek / worship the Lord God of Israel.

They observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days with joy.

They rejoiced because the Lord turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to encourage / aid them in their work.

You might ask your group when the last time was that they celebrated and rejoiced concerning the Lord's faithfulness.

Ask your group how they summarized Ezra 6 on their At a Glance charts.

Lord's house was completed / finished in King Darius's 6th year

**EZRA / HAGGAI
LEADER GUIDE
Lesson 3**

Lesson emphasis

- Haggai

REVIEW

To begin this discussion, you can ask your group what they remember of the history leading up to Ezra. Then ask what Ezra 1–6 is about.

Tell them to look at their Ezra at a Glance chart and “The Times of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther” timeline as visual aids for this discussion.

God’s people were sent into exile for seventy years because of their repeated faithlessness and disobedience to Him.

At the end of the seventy years, the Lord worked to send them back to Judah and Jerusalem.

Ezra 1	King Cyrus of Persia made a proclamation to rebuild God’s house God stirred up spirits to return and rebuild His house
Ezra 2	List of who returned to Judah
Ezra 3	They celebrated Feast of Booths and laid temple foundation
Ezra 4	Their enemies stopped the work during Cyrus’s reign
Ezra 5	The work resumed in 2 nd year of King Darius of Persia
Ezra 6	The Lord’s house was completed in King Darius’s reign, 6 th year

Why did the work on God’s house stop?

The Jews’ enemies in their land discouraged, frightened, and frustrated their counsel / purpose.

Why did the work resume according to Ezra 5:1-2?

When the prophets Haggai and Zechariah spoke in God’s name to His people, then they began to rebuild.

They supported the people with God’s word, His message to complete what He began.

HAGGAI 1

According to Haggai 1:1; 2:1, 10 and 20, when did Haggai speak for the Lord?

In Darius's 2nd year as king of Persia
from the 1st day of the 6th month until the 24th day of the 9th month

Verses 1-11

Who was his first message directed to?

He spoke to the leaders Zerubbabel and Joshua.
Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah, and Joshua was the high priest.

NOTE: Joshua is spelled "Jeshua" in Ezra. Compared with Ezra 5:13-17 and 6:7, Sheshbazzar was appointed by King Cyrus as governor of the Jews. He was the same one to whom Cyrus entrusted the transport of the utensils / vessels for the Lord's house from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Sheshbazzar might have been Zerubbabel's Babylonian name.

What did the Lord speak to those two leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, through Haggai?

The people said that the time hadn't come to rebuild the Lord's house. That was probably because of the enemies' / adversaries' accusations initially.

Ezra states opposition from enemies / adversaries as the reason the temple work stopped, but Haggai adds disobedience by the returning Jews as another reason.

What then did Haggai say to the people?

Consider your ways!

The Lord withheld the harvest to help them consider why they didn't have enough food, drink, warmth, and wages.

He withheld the rain and brought a drought, so they would consider building His house. He wanted their hearts set on Him, not on themselves.

How do Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 relate to this?

The Lord God withholds the rain to bring about obedience.
These things were designed to help them consider their ways.

Discuss if the same is true now.

Verses 12-15

What was the result in verse 12?

Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the people obeyed what the Lord said through Haggai.
Obedience shows reverence for / fear of the Lord.

What was Haggai's next message?

Twenty-three days later the Lord told the people, "I am with you."

He again stirred up their spirits so that they came and worked on His house.

Ask what your group noted on their Haggai at a Glance chart as a possible theme for Haggai 1.

Consider your ways and build my house

HAGGAI 2

Verses 1-9

What was Haggai's next message to all the people?

Almost a month later, the Lord spoke through Haggai again telling them to take courage and work because He was with them.

NOTE: Some in your group might notice that this day was the last of the Feast of Booths. The Lord told them He was with them, dwelling in their midst, on the last day of this feast.

He also made a comparison of the house they were beginning to work on with the first temple Solomon built. This one might seem like nothing in comparison (ESV—as nothing in your eyes).

When the foundation was laid, some wept when they saw it—those who'd seen the first temple, Ezra 3:10-13.

Then the message said for Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the people to take courage and work because the Lord was with them.

His Spirit was in their midst just as when He led Israel out of Egypt.
Then He said for them not to fear.

What are verses 6-9 about?

When the Lord will shake heavens
earth
sea
dry land
all the nations

Then nations will come with their wealth /treasures to His house.

This is a future temple.

How does Isaiah 60:1-11 relate?

This is about the future time when the wealth of the nations comes to Jerusalem.
They'll go / come to the Lord's altar with acceptance as He glorifies / beautifies His house.

NOTE: This speaks of the future temple Ezekiel saw in visions. The 2nd temple was the one of Ezra's days which Herod the Great refurbished before Jesus' time. The 1st temple that Solomon built was destroyed by the Babylonians.

What else will happen when the Lord shakes the heavens, earth...?

And He will fill this house with glory so that the latter will be greater than the former glory. There will be peace in this place—His house or Jerusalem.

How does Hebrews 12:25-29 compare with Haggai's message?

Verse 6 is quoted speaking of a future shaking of created things / things made—the heavens and earth. But His kingdom can't be shaken. Believers are part of His kingdom, not earthly kingdoms.

This text speaks of offering to the Lord gratitude and service / worship with reverence and awe. Romans 12:1-2 says worship is to present one's body as a living sacrifice.

How do the cross-references about Jesus relate?

Luke 2:22-35, John 1:14 and Hebrews 1:1-3

Jesus, the Lord's Christ—the glory of His people Israel—was brought into the temple when He was a child. He's the light of / for revelation to Gentiles, as well.

Jesus—the Word—showed God's glory to the world when He became flesh.
He's the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation / imprint of His nature.

Although the complete fulfillment of Haggai 2:6-9 seems still future, God's glory entered the second temple built in Ezra's and Haggai's times when Jesus entered the temple.

That second temple was also destroyed, but God's Spirit now dwells in the midst of His people the body of Christ. The Church is now His temple and shows His glory to the world.

What do the other New Testament cross-references say about the New Covenant temple?

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1; John 7:38-39 and 14:16-17

Believers are corporately and individually now the temple of God because His Spirit lives within each one. John 7:38-39 says that all believers receive the Spirit.

From the time Jesus was glorified, His Spirit came to indwell all believers forever—the temple of the living God.

1 Peter 2:1-5 and Romans 12:1-2

Believers are likened to living stones, being built up as a spiritual house.

Believers' bodies are to be presented as living sacrifices, not being conformed to this world. Christians are to be different from the world, renewing their minds and cleansing themselves from the world's defilements.

Lead your discussion back to Haggai 2.

Verses 10-19

What was Haggai's message in these verses?

A little more than two months later, Haggai spoke again to the people of Judah.

This time it was about them and their offerings being unclean. It sounds similar to the first message in 1:5-11.

Relate Numbers 19:11-13, 22 to Haggai 2:11-13. What's the illustration or principle of uncleanness?

Uncleanness spreads.

If the person is unclean, so is his offering, and anything else he touches becomes unclean.

How did this message end?

From that day forward the Lord will bless them.

Haggai 1:12 says that they obeyed the Lord and showed reverence for / feared Him. That was only a little over 3 months before this message.

Review the main points for application.

Consider your ways.

I am with you.

Take courage / Be strong and work; My Spirit is in your midst.

I'll bless you.

Verses 20-23

Who is the last message to / about?

The second message, on the day when the Lord said that He was going to bless His people, was specifically for Zerubbabel.

Verses 21-22 are very similar to verses 6-7.

“On that day,” verse 23, refers to the time of verses 21-22.

The Lord chose His servant Zerubbabel to make him like a signet ring.

Ask your group what they learned about a signet ring.

Genesis 41:41

When Pharaoh gave Joseph authority over Egypt, he gave him his signet ring as a symbol of that authority.

Esther 8:7-8

The seal of the king’s signet ring showed that he was behind the decree. It carried his authority.

Jeremiah 22:24-30

The Lord removed the authority of Judah’s kings, like taking off a signet ring. Coniah was the king of Judah taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C.

How do the Matthew passages relate to this?

Matthew 1:1-16

The genealogy of Jesus the Christ, Messiah

This line includes Zerubbabel and his grandfather Coniah or Jeconiah.

His descendants would not sit on the throne ruling in Jerusalem as he did. And none have to this day.

Zerubbabel had a right to the throne of Jerusalem, the throne of David. But he didn’t sit on the throne; he was only the governor appointed by a Gentile king who ruled over the people of Judah.

However, the One who is to sit on David’s throne is from David.

Matthew 25:31

Jesus, the King of the Jews, is coming again to sit on His glorious throne.

Ask about a possible theme for Haggai 2. Tell your group to look at their Haggai at a Glance chart.

Take courage and consider

Also, ask what your group noted as a theme for all of Haggai.

Consider your ways, build My house, I am with you

To end this discussion, you might review the messages of Haggai and their application. Then ask about Matthew 6:31-33 and how it relates.

Consider your ways.

I am with you.

Take courage / Be strong, I'm in your midst by My Spirit.

Don't be unclean. I'll bless you.

I've chosen you.

Don't be concerned for yourself and your needs. Seek first God's kingdom and all these things will be added to you.

**EZRA / HAGGAI
LEADER GUIDE
Lesson 4**

Lesson emphasis

- Ezra 7–8
- The Lord’s hand on Ezra

REVIEW

To begin this discussion, you can ask your group to look at Ezra At a Glance, “The Times of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther” timeline, and the map as visual aids for this discussion.

What are the main events of Ezra 1–6, and how does Haggai’s message relate to them?

Ezra 1	King Cyrus of Persia made a proclamation to rebuild God’s house God stirred up spirits to return and rebuild His house
Ezra 2	List of who returned to Judah
Ezra 3	They celebrated Feast of Booths and laid temple foundation
Ezra 4	Their enemies stopped the work during Cyrus’s reign
Haggai	Consider your ways, rebuild the temple—I am with you, will bless you
Ezra 5	The work resumed in 2 nd year of King Darius of Persia
Ezra 6	The Lord’s house was completed in King Darius’s reign, 6 th year

EZRA 7Verses 1-10

What happens in these verses and when?

These verses tell about Ezra leaving Babylon and going to Jerusalem during Artaxerxes’ 7th year of reign as King of Persia, verses 1 and 8.

What information do the cross-references in Esther 2 and 10 say?

Esther, a Jew, married King Ahasuerus—Xerxes—of Persia, and Mordecai was second to the king.

According to the chart, the events of Esther took place about 60 years after the temple was finished in Ezra 6 and about 15 years before Ezra chapter 8.

Ahasuerus was the king between Darius 1 and Artaxerxes.

What are verses 1-5? What do the cross-references say about some of the men?

This is Ezra's genealogy.

Ezra's great-grandfather was Hilkiah.

2 Chronicles 34:1, 8-9, 14-15, 18-21

Hilkiah was the high priest at the time of King Josiah's cleansing and revival in Judah.

He's the one who found the book of the law which had been lost in the Lord's house. Josiah the king of Judah read about God's wrath on those who forsake Him.

Ezra was also a descendant of Zadok.

1 Kings 2:27, 35

Zadok was the priest of King David's time

Faithful

Do according to God's heart and soul / mind

God will build him an enduring / a sure house

Walk (ESV—go in and out) before the Lord's anointed always

He was a priest from the line of Eleazar, Aaron's son, and Eleazar's son Phinehas.

Numbers 25:1-13

The Lord promised the priesthood to Phinehas because of his zeal for Him.

Lead the discussion back to Ezra 7. What are verses 6-7 about?

He was a scribe, skilled in the law of Moses. A scribe was an expert in the Law.

King Artaxerxes gave Ezra all he requested / asked because God's hand was on Ezra.

These verses also tell who else went with Ezra from Babylon to Jerusalem.

NOTE: Be sure your group looks at the map when you come to the names of places on it.

What and who do verses 8-9 tell about?

He made a journey from Babylon to Jerusalem which took only 4 months because the Lord's hand was on him.

Is the hand of the Lord still on believers? How? Ask your group to explain and give time for them to discuss application of this.

What does verse 10 say about Ezra?

Ezra set his heart to study, practice / do and teach God’s law in Israel.

Ask what your group learned about the definition of “study” in verse 10.

“seek with care, inquire”¹

NOTE: In case someone in your group brings it up—verses 6-10 seem to be an overview of chapters 7 and 8.

How is Nehemiah 8 an example of Ezra teaching God’s Word to Israel?

The people stood as he read it.

Then he blessed the Lord, and the people bowed in worship.

The Levites explained and read from the Law also, so that the people understood it.

That day was holy to the Lord as they understood and responded in grief and joy.

Verses 14-17 tell of the response to hearing about the Feast of Booths read from the Law.

Ezra read it daily for the whole eight days of the feast.

He got to do what he set his heart to do, Ezra 7:10.

What does 1 Peter 2:9-10 say about believers?

Believers are now a priesthood
to proclaim His excellencies
called out of darkness into light

Believers are to set their hearts to study His Word, practice / do it, and teach it to others.

You might ask your group if they are practicing what they are learning from their study of God’s Word and are they teaching it to someone? Give time for them to discuss application of this.

Lead your discussion back to Ezra 7.

Verses 11-26

What are these verses?

This is the decree King Artaxerxes sent with Ezra to Jerusalem.

¹R. Laird Harris, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980), 198.

Who are verses 11-20 addressed to and what is the content of this part of the decree?

Verse 12 says, “to Ezra...”

Any people of Israel in Babylon who wanted to go to Jerusalem with Ezra can go.

Ezra is sent by the king and his counselors to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem according to God’s law.

He was also sent to bring silver and gold offered by the king and his counselors to God.

And more was offered according to verse 16.

Money was to buy animals to offer when they got to Jerusalem.

How to spend the rest of the silver and gold was to be decided by Ezra and his brothers.

Utensils were given to be delivered for the Lord’s house.

It also says that any other needs were to be provided from the royal treasury.

Who are verses 21-24 directed to? And what did the decree say to them?

The treasurers beyond the River—those close to Jerusalem.

Ezra could request whatever was needed for the Lord’s temple from them.

NOTE: The River was probably the Euphrates.

They were to respond with zeal so that no wrath came against the kingdom of the king and his sons. He respected the God of heaven.

And the treasurers couldn’t impose tax on those who worked in connection with the temple.

Who are verses 25-26 directed to, and what is he told?

King Artaxerxes gave Ezra authority to enforce law in all the provinces beyond the River. He was to appoint magistrates and judges who knew God’s law and / or teach those who didn’t.

The King made it clear that all things were to be done according to God’s law, as Ezra was to teach.

Whoever didn’t obey God’s law faced severed punishment.

Verses 27-28

Why did Ezra bless the Lord?

The Lord God of Israel put into a pagan king's heart to adorn / beautify His house and send to Jerusalem priests, Levites, and people of Israel.

What strengthened Ezra to accomplish his task from the Lord?

Three times this chapter stated that the Lord's hand was on Ezra.

Ask your group how that fact relates to their lives. Give time to discuss application.

Tell them to look at their Ezra at a Glance chart. What is a possible theme for Ezra 7?

God's hand on Ezra; King Artaxerxes decreed for him to go to Jerusalem

EZRA 8

Verses 1-14

How does this chapter continue the flow of thought from Ezra 7?

Ezra 7:28 states that Ezra gathered leading men from Israel to go with him, and 8:1 begins to tell who those men were.

Verses 15-20

What was the problem in verse 15? Solution? Result?

The people about to journey to Jerusalem stayed at least 4 days at the river to Ahava. Ezra discovered that there were no Levites among them.

Ezra sent for "ministers," Levites.

Again, because the Lord's hand was on them, Levites answered the call.

What is the difference between priests and Levites? Discuss the cross-references.

Numbers 3:4-10; 8:14-19

Priests and Levites are both descendants of Levi, the tribe of Levi.
But only those in Aaron's line are priests.

The Levites perform certain duties in the temple to minister to the priests, who perform the sacrifices and offerings to the Lord.

The Lord Himself chose Levi and Aaron to be separate from the others of Israel. Understanding the difference between priests and Levites helps to understand why Ezra needed Levites to return to Jerusalem with the others who were priests and people of Israel.

Lead your discussion back to Ezra 8. What happened in verses 21-23?

Ezra proclaimed a fast to humbly seek the Lord’s protection for their journey.

What had Ezra told the king about the Lord?

The Lord’s hand is favorably on those who seek Him
And His power and anger are against those who forsake Him

Those with Ezra fasted and sought the Lord, and He answered.

Ask your group what they learned from the cross-references about seeking the Lord—“set your heart.”

1 Chronicles 22:17-19

King David commanded the leaders of Israel to help his son Solomon build the first temple.

“Set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord . . . and build. . . .”
(ESV—“Set your mind and heart to seek the Lord . . . and build. . . .”)

2 Chronicles 12:13-14

King Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, was described as doing evil because he didn’t set his heart to seek the Lord; he “strengthened himself / grew strong.”

2 Chronicles 19:1-7

King Jehoshaphat of Judah set his heart to seek God. He appointed judges in Judah’s cities, judges who were to fear the Lord. He led his people back to the Lord.

Lead your discussion back to Ezra 8.

Verses 24-30

Who are these verses about? What did they do?

Priests and Levites

Ezra set apart 12 priests to be entrusted with the transport of the silver, gold, and utensils / vessels—the offering from King Artaxerxes, his counselors and princes / lords, and the people of Israel.

Ezra reminded the priests and Levites of their holiness before the Lord.

Verses 31-34

What are these verses about?

This is about the journey.

They left from the river Ahava on the 12th day of the 1st month.

Ezra began to leave Babylon on the 1st day of the 1st month.

The journey took four months, during which time the Lord protected them from ambushes by the way.

The Lord's hand is greater than the enemy's hand, verse 31.

The offering was given to the priests in Jerusalem at the Lord's house.

The Lord protected; He answered prayer, He listened, 8:22-23.

Verses 35-36

What happened?

These exiles made offerings at the Lord's house when they returned to Jerusalem. They delivered the king's edicts to the satraps and governors in the area.

And they supported the people, evidently the ones who were already in Jerusalem, and the temple.

Ask about a possible theme for Ezra 8 as your group looks at their At a Glance chart.

Ezra and people returned to Jerusalem; God's hand on them

Ask if there is any personal application that has not been discussed.

**EZRA / HAGGAI
LEADER GUIDE
Lesson 5**

Lesson emphasis

- Ezra 9–10

REVIEW

To begin this last discussion, you might ask what your group has learned from the whole course.

Then ask for a brief review of the main themes of Ezra / Haggai.

Use the At a Glance charts as visual aid for this discussion.

Ezra 1	God stirred up spirits to return and rebuild His house King Cyrus of Persia made a proclamation to rebuild God's house
Ezra 2	List of who returned to Judah from Babylon with Zerubbabel
Ezra 3	Jews celebrated Feast of Booths and laid temple foundation
Ezra 4	Their enemies stopped the work during Cyrus's reign
Haggai	Consider your ways, rebuild the temple—I am with you, will bless you
Ezra 5	The work resumed in 2 nd year of King Darius of Persia
Ezra 6	The Lord's house was completed in King Darius's reign, 6 th year
Ezra 7	God's hand on Ezra to lead Jews to Jerusalem, Artaxerxes' 7 th year
Ezra 8	Those who returned to Judah with Ezra / God's hand on their journey

EZRA 9Verses 1-4

What happened in these verses?

Ezra was appalled because the people of Israel had intermarried with the peoples of the lands.

Why was this appalling to him? Ask what your group learned from the cross-references.

Deuteronomy 7:1-6

The Lord clearly commanded His people Israel not to intermarry with the people living in the land they were about to enter. They were to be a holy people to the Lord their God.

The reason was that they would lead Israel to worship other gods.

And that's what happened.

1 Kings 11:1-10

Solomon was the first of the kings of Israel to marry foreign women. They led him to worship other gods. His sin resulted in God dividing the kingdom in two.

Worshiping other gods was why God sent Israel and Judah captive to the nations. The people of Judah returned 70 years later from Babylon.

Lead the discussion back to Ezra 9. According to verses 1-2, who was involved?

The princes / officials were the ones who told Ezra and were the foremost in the unfaithfulness.

The holy race intermingled / mixed itself with the peoples of the lands.

What do Ruth and Corinthians say about holy relationships?

Ruth 1:1-7, 15-22; 4:8-17

Since the Moabitess Ruth took Naomi's God to be her own, then Ruth became a proselyte to Judaism.

It was right for Boaz to marry her and establish a descendant for Naomi's dead husband and sons.

Ruth is the great grandmother of King David and is in the line of Christ, Matthew 1:1-6.

1 Corinthians 7:39 and 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1

The Lord's instruction for believers now is not to be bound together with unbelievers.

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are to marry only others who are "in the Lord."

What was Ezra's response in verse 3?

Tore his garments, pulled hair from his head and beard—signs of mourning, humiliation.

Who gathered to Ezra in 9:4?

Everyone who trembled at the Lord's Word

You might ask if there is any application for your group from verses 1-4.

How did others in the Bible respond to sin? Ask about the cross-references.

1 Samuel 2 and 3

Eli's sons were evil men, serving in the priesthood.

Eli knew of their sin, but didn't rebuke / restrain them
—so they all paid the consequences.

1 Samuel 15

King Saul knew what the Lord told him to do through Samuel the prophet. But he only obeyed what he wanted to. Therefore, the Lord rejected Saul from being king because he'd rejected the Lord's Word.

But Samuel confronted Saul's sin—unlike Eli with his sons.

Jeremiah 1:16; 6:15; 8:18–9:1

God's people forsook Him for other gods, and they weren't even ashamed.

Jeremiah was sorrowful, mourned.
He was broken / wounded and dismayed because of their sins.

What is application for the church in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13?

Mourn over sin in the church.

Don't be arrogant about tolerating it.

Remove it from the church's midst.

Don't associate with any "so-called" (ESV—anyone who bear the name of) brother who continues in his sin.

God judges the unbelievers, but the church is to correct its own—or those who claim to be His.

With an attitude of restoration and love
By the Word of God and prayer

Lead your discussion back to Ezra 9. What are verses 5-15 and about what?

This is Ezra's prayer about their iniquity.

He recounted Israel’s sin and captivity; then he mentioned God’s grace / favor toward the escaped remnant (ESV does not use “escaped”). The Lord didn’t forsake them in their bondage / slavery.

Verse 9 speaks of God’s lovingkindness / steadfast love, reviving, and restoration / repair.

Verse 13 says He requited / punished them less than their sins deserved.
This is a wonderful statement of God’s mercy.

You might ask what this means and how it applies to believers now.

What else did Ezra say in his prayer?

He said the Lord was right to destroy them if the sin continued.

No one can stand before the Lord because of sin.

Ezra confessed the people’s sin as though it were his own.

Tell your group to look at their At a Glance chart and ask about a possible theme for Ezra 9.

Ezra appalled; people intermingled / mixed themselves with others of lands—Ezra prayed

EZRA 10

Verses 1-4

How does this chapter continue with the results from chapter 9?

While Ezra prayed, a large group assembled and wept bitterly for their sins.

A man named Shecaniah suggested a plan for hope.

Make a covenant with the Lord to put away the foreign wives, children.

Do it according to God’s law, as counseled by Ezra and those who trembled at God’s command, 9:4.

He called Ezra to take responsibility as a righteous priest.

Be courageous / strong and act.

Who was Shecaniah’s family?

He was Jehiel’s son and Elam’s grandson.

Verses 26 lists Shecaniah’s father Jehiel as one who had a foreign wife.
His uncles had done the same.

What might it have cost Shecaniah to make this stand with Ezra against this sin?

His family

Relate this to Matthew 10:32-38 and application for believers now.

Jesus said that anyone who loves his family more than Him is not worthy to be His disciple.

Sometimes when one in an unbelieving family becomes a believer in Jesus, that one becomes an outsider to his natural family.

Verses 5-8

What happened?

Ezra made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take an oath according to Shecaniah's proposal.

Then they made a proclamation for Judah and Benjamin to assemble to Jerusalem in three days.

Relate verse 8 with Ezra 7:25-26.

Ezra had authority from King Artaxerxes of Persia to judge all in the king's provinces beyond the Euphrates, even to the point of banishment or confiscation of goods or imprisonment.

But he had to exercise that authority over his own people Israel.

Verses 9-17

How was the problem handled?

On the 20th day of the 9th month Israel assembled at Jerusalem.

It was during the rainy season / time of heavy rain, the end of November and beginning of December. All the people assembled and sat trembling because of the matter and the rain.

Ezra confronted their sin and told them to confess it before the Lord and do His will—separate from their foreign wives.

The assembly agreed. But each case was dealt with city by city.

What was the opposition?

A few men stood against the decision.

NOTE: Commentators and scholars disagree as to which decision it was—separating from the foreign wives or doing it at appointed time in the cities.

How long did the investigation take? What did that indicate?

According to verses 16-17, the investigation took three months.

According to the lists in verses 18-43, there were many in Israel who had sinned by intermarriage with the people around them.

Ask your group what they noted as a possible theme for Ezra 10 on their At a Glance chart.

Put away foreign wives

Ask your group what they learned about marriage and divorce from Malachi and Corinthians.

Malachi 2:10-16

A little over twenty years after the incident in Ezra 9–10, the Lord spoke to the priests of Israel about corrupting the covenant.

God was not accepting their offerings, and He told them why.

He told them not to deal treacherously with the wives of their youth by covenant—those were women of Israel, not the foreign wives of Ezra’s time. Evidently these priests were divorcing their wives.

God said that He hates divorce

(ESV—For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her).

1 Corinthians 7:12-16

Believers are to marry believers, not unbelievers.

But if one becomes a believer after he/she is married, then the believer is not to divorce the unbeliever. Their union might lead to the unbeliever’s salvation.

Or the unbeliever might choose to leave / divorce the believer.

If so, then the believer is free.

If you’re a Christian married to an unbeliever, what should you do?

Stay, pray, and live godly.

To end your study of Ezra, you might ask your group what they’ve learned from the whole study. Give time for them to share. Encourage them to bring another person with them to the next study.