

Crosswalk Communities Discussion Guides
(Feb 20th – 26th)

Icebreaker Questions (Pick at the least one question, but use as many as your group feels comfortable)

1. What is your favorite board or card game?

Bible Study Questions

1. If you have been reading in 1st and 2nd Kings, what have you been learning? What do you notice about God? Who do you identify with? What questions do you have?
2. At the end of 2 Kings, the Jews find themselves lost and devastated. They have lost their homes and their God. Have you ever had a time that you could relate to that? Tell the story
3. Read Ezra 1:1-8, 3:1-3, 3:10-13, 4:1-5, 5:1-2, 6:1-15
 - In these passages, how do you see God at work?
 - What obstacles did they experience and how did God navigate them?
 - What do you think that this experience taught the people about the character of God?
4. In 3:11-13, it says that the older members wept at the completion of the temple. Why do you think that this happened? (Haggai 2:1-3 can help shed some light on this)
 - What do you think that they longed for that was missing?
5. Read Matthew 1:20-23. Remember that Joseph would have interpreted “saving his people from their sins” as referring to the sin of Israel and the exile.
 - How does the restoration in Ezra point to the fuller restoration through Jesus?
6. What is your story of restoration? Share with the group how God did restoration in your life.

Feb 24th
The Fall and Rise of the Jewish Empire

Intro: At the end of 2 Kings, it couldn't get worse. The people have been sent from their homeland and the temple has been destroyed. Without the temple, they could not offer sacrifices and were therefore unable to obtain God's forgiveness. It looks as if it is "game over" with no hope.

I. God was committed to the restoration of his people: This was clear through the prophets. He was committed to his mission to redeem people and was going to bring about an act or restoration.

a. He moved foreign kings to create the opportunity for rebuilding: God continually moves foreign pagan leaders to aid in restoration. King Cyrus of Persian officially orders the rebuilding of the temple and authorizes the Jews to return to complete the task (Ezra 1:2-3). In the face of opposition, the work was also supported by King Darius (Ezra 6). King Artaxerxes commissioned his servant Nehemiah to do the work of rebuilding the city walls (Nehemiah 2:8)

b. He prompted foreign empires to provide funds and protection: Darius ordered that expenses for the building of the temple be taken out of the royal treasury (Ezra 6:8) and that anyone who attempted to stop the work was to be put to death (Ezra 6:11-12).

c. He provided the motivation for his people to work: The work quickly runs into opposition from local troublemakers. Also many of the Jews become more focused on their own homes than the work that God had told them to do. He raises up the prophet Haggai and Zechariah who ministers to them from within and gives them the courage to continue (Ezra 5:1)

II. God's restoration would come to completion through Jesus.
Rebuilding the temple meant that worship could resume but there was no filling of the temple with God's presence. God still remained distant. When the angel appeared to Joseph in Matthew 1:21, he said that Jesus would "*save his people from their sins*" This meant that Jesus was going to officially bring about the long waited restoration. Jesus would be the temple, God's presence come to us on earth. What more, he would offer himself as a sacrifice bringing about the forgiveness long awaited by the people.

Conclusion

The book of Ezra is not just a story about God doing an act of restoration, but a continual act of a God's whose very character longs to restore others to himself. The restoration offered by Jesus is available to us all.

In Ezra, 50,000 Jews embraced the opportunity to return to Jerusalem while many chose to stay behind. We have that same choice.