**Fellowship CommUnity Group**

 **Discussion Guide for Leaders**

*Series: Ruin, Rebuild, Renew*

*Sermon: The Sovereign God Directs a Pagan King*

 *1-27-19*

***Group Leaders & Host Homes*** *: Thank You for your service to the Lord and to your group by faithfully opening your homes and through leading the groups in discussion. May God richly bless you as you continue to participate in this disciple making ministry.*

1. **Getting To Know Each Other** Opening Question: **Share something that you are excited about or looking forward to in 2019.**
* **Opening Prayer**. (Either leader, host home or someone who is willing to pray out loud)

*(Notes from message for reference only – use only as needed)*

**\*\***Use Sermon notes bulletin insert

* Ezra and Nehemiah were written as one scroll in Hebrew. Ezra is broken up into two parts – Part 1 is chapters one through six and Part 2 is chapters 7-10.
* The book of Ezra covers about 93 years of Israel’s history from 538- 445BC. Ezra is traditionally considered the author of both Ezra and Nehemiah, it is also likely that the author of Ezra is the author of the Chronicles. Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi all cover the same general period of time in Israel’s history.
* **Historical Background to Ezra**
* 930BC – Following the death of Solomon, David’s kingdom splits into two kingdoms.
* The Northern Kingdom referred to as Israel and consisting of 10 tribes, the capital city of the northern kingdom is Samaria. The Southern Kingdom referred to as Judah, and consisting of two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, and Jerusalem is the capital city of Judah.
* 722BC – The Northern Kingdom, Israel is defeated by Assyria.
* 606BC – The Southern Kingdom, Judah is attacked by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and some Jews are taken captive to Babylon.
* 586BC – The Southern Kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem and the temple is destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and a large remnant of Jews are taken captive to Babylon.
* Exile – The exile is the 70yr period of time in which Jews taken captive from Judah were in captivity in Babylon.
* 539BC – Cyrus King of Persia conquers Babylon and allows the Jewish exiles in Babylon to return home to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple which is in ruins. This is where the book of Ezra starts.
* **Two Important Questions**
* **1) Why would the Jews want to leave their life in Babylon to return to the ruin of Jerusalem?** They went back because God stirred them to go back.
* **2) Why does God want them to go back to rebuild the temple? Why is that so important to God?**
* God is seeking to restore his people to proper worship and that proper worship will start with the rebuilding of the temple.

**Into The Text** (15 Minutes) (Leaders: This time is not meant to be application yet, this is time in the Word, before we seek to apply truth, we need to understand the truth. The section after this one will focus on application.)

1. Ask someone to read 2 Chronicles 36:14-21. *Ask: What sin/sins did the nation of Judah commit against the Lord? Describe the details of the ruin that Nebuchadnezzar brought to the people, Jerusalem, and the temple. Was God being unmerciful to Judah?*
2. Ask someone to read Ezra 1:1-4*. Ask: What motivated King Cyrus to issue this proclamation? What did Ezra mean when he wrote in V1 ‘that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled’?* Ask someone to read Jeremiah 16:15*. Ask: What did God promise Judah through Jeremiah? Was God now fulfilling this promise?*
3. *Ask: Why is Cyrus allowing the Jews to go back to Jerusalem? What is his motivation? How does the Cyrus Cylinder help us to understand this better? Did God and Cyrus have the same goal in the Jews going back to Jerusalem?*
4. Ask someone to read Ezra 1:5-11. *Ask: Why did God lead Cyrus and the neighbors of the Jews to aid the exiles with gold, silver and goods? How is this similar to the exodus? What is significant about all of the sacred objects going back to Jerusalem?*
5. *Ask: Why was God ultimately bringing his people back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple?*

**Application** (15-20 Minutes)

1. Say: **Let’s move to application**. *Ask: Why is it important that we take time to study all genres of scripture? Does the book of Ezra have relevant truth for all of us?*
2. The sovereignty of God is a main theme in this book. *Ask: Why is it important that we understand God to be the one that is directing the king and the people?* *How can God’s sovereignty over Israel long ago help us to understand his sovereignty over our lives today?* *What does it mean that God is sovereign over your life? Does this mean you are not responsible for your actions and choices?*
3. Ask: *Do you think that all of the Jews wanted to go back to the ruin of Jerusalem? Why or why not?* Ezra said ‘Then rose up…everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild’*. What does that mean? Is God still in the business of ‘stirring hearts and spirits’?*
4. Ezra tells us that proper worship is the goal of the return. *What needs to change in your life for you to be restored to God-glorifying worship? What are the idols that get in the way of our pure worship of God?*

**Closing Prayer Time**: (10-12 Minutes) **(Leader Say:**) Let’s close with a time of prayer. Let’s ask Lord to return all of us to true worship, whatever rebuilding is necessary, let him do it in our lives. *(Ask someone to open, let people pray as they feel led, and then leader closes.)*