

EXILE AND BEYOND—2

So Far

In the first session we heard of the actual events of the exile of Israel and Judah (main dates 721 and 586 BC), the horrific human cost of these events, their centrality in the biblical record. We also saw the direct personal engagement of God in these terrible events, in the context of God's covenant with the people of Israel.

Any questions or reflections on that?

We saw that as far as God is concerned, the exile is an event that disrupts the creation to its very heart: **Deuteronomy 32:22**. We also began to see that the exile is not the end of God's dealings with His people, but rather gives rise to a new and greater beginning: the scattering is followed by a new gathering: **Deuteronomy 30:3-5**.

Return from Exile

Jeremiah was given a specific timeline: **Jeremiah 30:1-3; 29:10-11; 25:11-12**. **2 Chronicles 36:20-23** sees the return under Cyrus in 538 BC as a fulfilment of this prophecy. But we saw that the timing does not quite line up, leading us to think that Jeremiah's 'seventy years' may be a symbolic round number, denoting completeness or fullness of time (compare Matthew 18:21-22; Galatians 4:4).

There are also a number of promised conditions of the return which are not given immediate fulfilment at that time: total forgiveness of sins (**Jeremiah 31:34**)—the old temple sacrifices were resumed—and an inward impartation of the Spirit (**Ezekiel 36:26-27**). Post-exilic prophecy (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) still had to deal with issues similar to those that prevailed before the exile. Isaiah mentions Cyrus in connection with the return (Isaiah 45:1), but also speaks of an anointed conqueror who is endowed with the Spirit (61:1; 63:1), and of a servant who will suffer greatly (52:13-53:12).

An alternative interpretation of Jeremiah's 'seventy years', also involving a symbolic round number ('seventy weeks' of years) is given to Daniel in **Daniel 9:1-2, 20-24**, as the time 'to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place' (or 'a most holy one'). The Jewish historian Josephus (37-100 AD) indicated that these hopes and expectations were still very much alive in his own day, when he linked it with the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.¹ Jesus referred to an aspect of this prophecy of Daniel as still to come (see Daniel 9:27; Mark 13:14). Prophecies in the Old Testament can be fulfilled at different levels. For example, David was promised an offspring who would build a house for God's name, whose kingship would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:10-16). David's immediate son Solomon built the temple (2 Kings 8:20), but his kingship did not last for ever. So the prophecy was still waiting for its ultimate fulfilment when Jesus came (see John 12:34). So can we say that that the promised return was fulfilled in the time of Cyrus and the years that followed? Judah remained under foreign domination, and in Jesus' time there were those who were still 'looking forward to the consolation of Israel' (Simeon) and 'waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem' (Anna and others; Luke 2:25, 38).

¹*Jewish Antiquities* x. 276, cited in Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: and Introduction and Commentary*, InterVarsity Press, Leicester UK, 1978, p. 175

Jesus and the Temple

Consider what the exile meant to God personally, as the devastation of that in which God had invested God's whole self: **2 Kings 9:1-9**. This takes on particular poignancy in the light of Jesus' statement in **John 2:18-21**. For Jesus, the fate of the temple was very much tied up with his own (see Mark 13:1-2; 14:57-59; 15:29-30, 38). Ezekiel is given in a vision to see the departure of the glory of God from the temple, as Jerusalem is consigned to destruction: **Ezekiel 9:3-6; 10:18-19; 11:22-23**. Can we relate this to the cry of desolation from the cross (**Mark 15:34**)? Ezekiel also describes the return of God to a completely refurbished temple: **Ezekiel 43:1-7; 44:4; 48:35**. We could say that this is fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus (as in John 2:18), and the dwelling of God among his people in Christ, both individually (see John 14:15-23; 1 Corinthians 6:19) and corporately (2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5). But there is a sense in which it will not be fulfilled finally until **Revelation 21:2-3, 22**.

The Scattering and the Gathering

The relationship of Jesus with the exile is further hinted at in this incident on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane: **Mark 14:26-28**. While the scattering may be a mercy for the deserting sheep, in that they are not there when the final judgment strikes, it is also a judgment on them for their desertion (compare **Deuteronomy 28:64**). This is also where the promised re-gathering begins (compare **Deuteronomy 30:3-5**): **Mark 16:7; Matthew 28:16**.

Exile and the Whole Story of The Bible

Going right back to **Genesis 3:22-24**. See <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/exile/>
There is a sense in which we are still in exile until the final fulfilment. In the third session, we will consider how we are to conduct ourselves as Christians in this exile.