

Exile

STUDY NOTES

the BIBLE
PROJECT

SECTION 1: INTRO TO EXILE

00:00–00:30

Jon: There's something about being home where everything's just right. We're surrounded by people we love and trust; there's a feeling of stability and safety.

Tim: And while some people get to experience this kind of home, many do not. Others might even be forced to leave their home and go live in a foreign land. We call this going into exile.

Jon: Yeah. In exile, everything is disorienting. You're in the unknown.

SECTION 2: ISRAEL IN EXILE

00:31–00:51

Tim: And in the story of the Bible, this is where the ancient Israelites found themselves, conquered by Babylon, living exile, far from their homeland.

Jon: And so they had to ask themselves: how did we end up here? And is there any hope of going home?

Tim: The whole story of the Bible is designed to address those very questions.

Jon: The whole story, really?¹

1. The exile of the Israelites to Babylon is one of the most important events in the entire Bible. This experience shaped every part of the Bible, and the

theme of exile and return from exile is the backbone of the entire biblical story from the garden all the way to Revelation.

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Tim: Yeah. Go back to the first pages of the Bible. Where does humanity live?

Jon: Okay. They live in this really sweet garden, their home.

Tim: And they're there on one condition: that they trust and follow God's one command. And they don't. And so the consequence is banishment from the garden.²

Jon: Ah, they're sent into exile.

Tim: Exactly. And so this story's been designed to set you up for Israel's story, how they were given the gift of the promised land and were able to stay there on one condition: that they be faithful to the terms of their covenant relationship with God.

Jon: They didn't, and they were sent into exile.

Tim: And if you still don't see the parallel between exile from the garden and exile from Israel, think about this: in Genesis, humanity's exile led up to the story about the building of what city?

Jon: Oh yeah, Babylon! The same place the Israelites are sent.³

2. You can read this in Genesis 3.

3. Read about God scattering the city of Babylon in Genesis 11.

Tim: But that's not the end of either story. In the first Babylon, God called Abraham to leave and travel to the promised land. And that story was designed to give hope to the Israelites currently living in the later Babylon.

Jon: Now eventually, they do get to leave and travel back to the promised homeland.

Tim: And when they did, it wasn't home sweet home. Oppressive empires were still ruling over them, and the people kept acting in the same corrupt ways as their ancestors. And so the biblical prophets said that exile wasn't actually over.

Jon: How could they think they were still in exile when they're at home?

Tim: Yeah, this is really important. In the Hebrew scriptures, Israel's Babylonian exile became an image of something more universal. It's that feeling of alienation and longing for something more, no matter where you live.⁴

Jon: Yeah. I can relate to this. I have a great home, but it's situated in a world scarred with pain and broken relationships, death and tragedy, done by others but also done by me.

Tim: And so in the Bible, exile is the human condition. We all keep repeating this pattern of human corruption leading to a Babylon that we can't escape. And it doesn't matter where you live, we are all longing for a better home.

4. The Bible is the product of a displaced, exiled people and a document for exiles—people who have a complex relationship with their actual "home" as they long for a greater "home" that is not possible in the current world order.

The story of the Bible is about people who had to cultivate a unique identity as God's people while integrating into the dominant cultures that were totally contrary to the Kingdom of God.

Jon: Now Israel's scriptures held out hope that one day God would send a king who would rescue the world from all of the Babylons we've created.

Tim: And after many generations pass, we meet this Israelite named Jesus of Nazareth. He wandered about with no home, announcing the great restoration, that reality of home that Israel and all humanity has been looking for.

Jon: Yeah. Jesus really cared about people who didn't have homes. He welcomed in the stranger. He said God's love is shown when you invite in the outcast and throw parties for people who don't have a place to belong.

Tim: Jesus also claimed that Israel and all humanity had lost its way, that our self-centeredness drives us to create false homes based on status and power, and these inevitably exclude others. We live in an exile of our own making. But Jesus said the true way home is one of weakness, of service, and of forgiveness.⁵

And then Jesus went into exile alongside us to show us the true way home.

Jon: Which is...

Tim: Well, Jesus said he is the way. His life and self-giving love proved more powerful than humanity's failure. He opened up a pathway to our real home.⁶

5. Throughout the book of Matthew, Jesus echoes the words of the prophet Jeremiah, drawing on the symbolism of exile. Jesus too upheld the non-violent commission to seek peace in the midst of exile.

6. These words are found in John 14:6.

And as Jesus' followers committed themselves to him, they discovered this new way of being human. They believed that the real return from exile had begun, and so they would call themselves "sojourners or wanderers."⁷

Jon: Oh right, they would say things like "the world isn't our home" and "we're citizens of heaven."

Tim: And so Jesus' followers remain exiles as they wait for that day when Jesus returns to transform this world into a true home.

7. See 1 Peter 1:1-2 for an example of this.

