

THE BIBLE PROJECT

Quarterly

# Exile

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DIGITAL EDITION

#004

2018

SUMMER

THE BIBLE PROJECT | QUARTERLY

# We believe the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus and has wisdom for the modern world.

## VISION

We want to see a permanent and worldwide change in people's paradigm of the Bible.

## STRATEGIES

- i. High-quality, mission-focused content for free
- ii. Strategic partnerships for distribution
- iii. Forward thinking use of technology
- iv. Crowd-funded revenue



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# Welcome

You live as a citizen under some sort of government. You may live in a democracy, a republic, a monarchy, a dictatorship, a communist regime, or any mixture of these. You might like your government system, or you might not. You might like the people running the government, or you might like the ones who are wanting to take control of the government. The people in charge may be corrupt, or perhaps they're not. Most likely they are a mixed bag of good and evil, just like you and me.

The temptation in all of this is to choose a side on one issue, or a set of issues, and then declare extreme boundary lines. I'm either for my government or against it, based on who's in charge. I'm for this political party and I'm against that political party.

As we read Scripture together, we find that following Jesus means that we have already chosen a side, or as Jesus put it, we've chosen a way. The way of Jesus is one of justice and generosity, love and sacrifice for the well-being of my neighbor, no matter what side they are on. The way of Jesus believes that power isn't something you take; rather, it's something you discover by giving it up and serving others from a place of weakness. The way of Jesus looks silly to organized power structures, including the one in which we live.

And here's the rub. Choosing the way of Jesus doesn't allow us to opt out of the political system into which we were born. Just the opposite, it calls us to a

high degree of personal engagement. But how are Christians supposed to act as citizens? When do we compromise and adopt the values of the culture and governing structures around us? When should we withdraw and create an alternative culture that doesn't participate in the existing power structures? And when do we resist or even revolt against those structures?

These are pressing questions that every generation of Jesus' followers have had to ask in whatever culture they find themselves. The Bible doesn't give God's people a clear set of directions on this matter, but it does give us a robust and sophisticated story that can help us navigate these complex realities. It's the story of Israel's exile.

When Jerusalem was overtaken by the Babylonian empire, they found themselves under a power structure they hated. But the prophet Jeremiah told the Israelites to pray for Babylon and seek its well-being once they were exiled there. This counsel was followed by Daniel and his three friends, as they served the king of Babylon in his courts. They would seek the well-being of the empire and offer their best efforts to the king. But when the king exalted his own power to divine status and called them to offer allegiance to Babylon as though it were God, they peacefully protested and put their lives on the line.

Centuries later, during the time of Jesus, the reigning empire was Rome, and the question of what it meant to live in the



empire while serving God faithfully was on the mind of most Jews. The leader of Rome, Caesar, claimed to be a divine king. Shouldn't he be resisted too, as Daniel and his friends did in Babylon? Well, Jesus took a different approach. When Jerusalem's religious leaders asked Jesus whether it was permissible to pay taxes to Caesar, they were hoping to trap him in an impossible situation. Would he legitimate the Roman occupation of their ancestral land, or would he advocate revolt? Instead, Jesus took a Roman coin and asked them, "whose image is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. "Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and give back to God what is God's"

This is an answer that is simultaneously simple and profound, almost like a riddle. Give the king back his coins. They bear his image, after all. But give to God what bears his image, which, of course, is your entire life and allegiance. This is Jesus' summary of the loyalty and subversion necessary for living as citizens in whatever government you find yourself. Honor the

governing structures where you live, but remember their authority over you is superseded by your true loyalty to Jesus.

Jesus didn't fight to take down Rome. He instead showed his true power by laying down his life, and he instituted a new type of power structure, an upside-down way that he called "the Kingdom of God."

Within the last year, we've created two videos that explore these ideas. The first one, *Exile*, explores the biblical theme and teaches that the type of power structure you find yourself in is not your true home. The second video, *Way of the Exile*, is all about the complex reality of adopting the way of Jesus while living as citizens in your own country.

This issue of *The Quarterly* is about those two ideas. We hope you enjoy it and find yourself becoming better and bolder citizens in your corner of the world.

Cheers!

JON AND TIM



STUDIO

# Audience Engagement

BY MAKENZIE HALBERT-HOWEN

**I sat down with Danny Danciu, the audience engagement coordinator at TBP, to talk about his role in our weekly podcast, and specifically about how the audience interacted with the Exile series in our Q+R episodes.**

MHH: MAKENZIE HALBERT-HOWEN

DD: DANNY DANCIU

Danny came from a background in marketing to work full-time at The Bible Project in January of this year. As the audience engagement coordinator, he handles digital promotion, publishing, and social media.

**MHH:** *What has the transition been like going from a traditional marketing background to engagement for a nonprofit like TBP?*

**DD:** It's been a joy to come here and do something where people are excited about what we're doing. They're excited to share the content we're putting out, and so it makes my job really fun.

**MHH:** *So you're interacting with our audience mainly through social media, which is awesome, but I'd love to focus on your role with the podcast.*

**DD:** Yeah, so along with Matthew, our brand designer, we find music for each show, which is really fun. Because either through ties in the community, our churches, or people on social, people want to contribute to the project. We're seeing our generosity model spilling over, and people want to give back in unique ways. And so they will offer to let us use their music for our episodes.

**MHH:** *That's so cool.*

**DD:** Then I get to be involved in the publishing process, as our episodes go out on all of the major podcasting platforms. I'll listen



through the episodes, send any issues or changes over to Dan Gummel, who produces our show, and then each episode goes to Jon for final approval.

**MHH:** *What do the Q+R episodes of the podcast look like for you?*

**DD:** They're definitely more involved for me than our regular episodes, but the extra work for me is an enjoyable extra step. It's cool that with these episodes, the audience can engage directly. Being on the social side, usually I have to apologize to people who are wanting to get in contact with Jon and Tim. Because their schedules are so packed, I can't pass along every theological question we get, so it's fun to get to facilitate this type of interaction. Amber Dillon, our office administrator, filters through the emails from our audience, but every time we do a Q+R episode, I go through them. It's really fun to do, and a lot of the time, the questions some of our listeners have are the same ones I have.

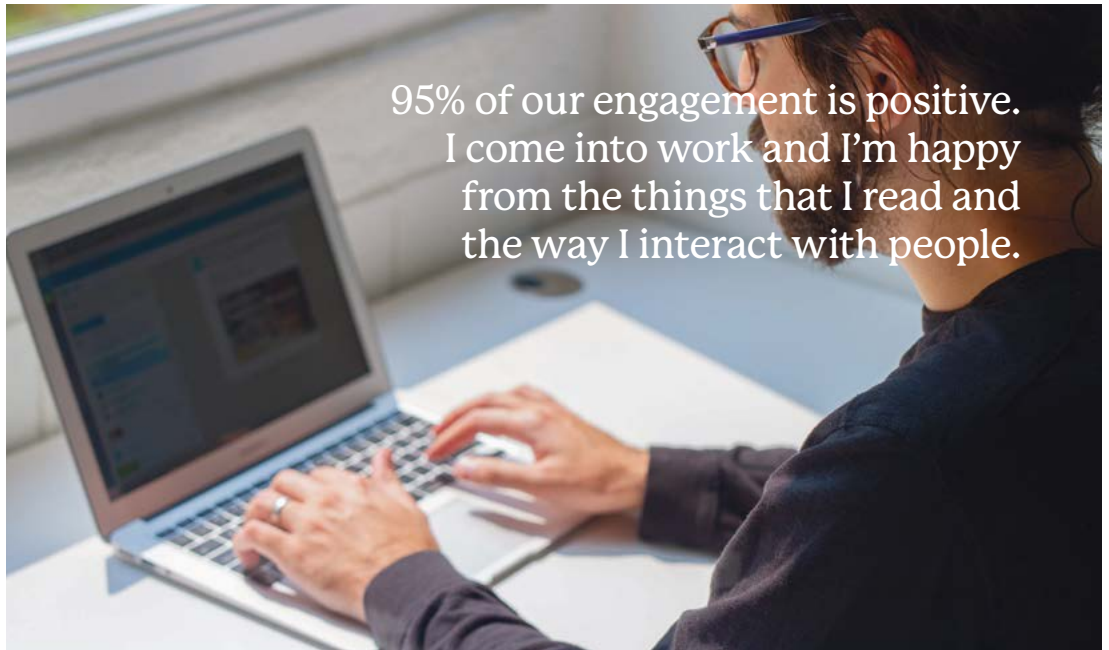
**MHH:** *How has your engagement with the audience changed how you view the work that's being done here, if at all?*

**DD:** It's been very positive. 95% of our engagement is positive. I come into work and I'm happy from the things that I read and the way I interact with people. Because I have a clear idea of the metrics, the way I see people consuming our podcast and videos, it's exciting. It's a lot of fun to see our growth from a metric standpoint.

**MHH:** *Has the podcast audience grown significantly?*

**DD:** Definitely. The growth has been pretty steady over time, but it seems like we're reaching a point of maturity, and it's more stable at this point. Right now, we have about 135,000 downloads a week, depending on the topic. The big catchphrase titles for episodes, like our God series for example, do really well.





**MHH:** *Was there anything surprising about the audience response to the Exile series on the podcast?*

**DD:** Next to the Soul series, the Exile series was my favorite that we've done. The audience did a great job in the Q+R tying in other big topics, like environmentalism, new creation, immigration, heaven and earth, new bodies. There were these wide overarching biblical themes that made their way into this Q+R episode. It was awesome. And we got a lot of downloads on that episode too.

It was also a fun one to do because there was such a ramp up to the series on social media. We teased it for months in advance, so there was a lot of anticipation. Matthew and I, we worked through the teasers for this. And we got to open a door for people to see behind the scenes through this Exile series, and the whole process for this series was so much fun. It was the strongest marriage I've seen between video production and the podcast in terms of promotion.

**MHH:** *The Exile series is great. It seems like there has been a great response to it, even though it's not a biblical theme that is talked about a ton.*

**DD:** Yeah, my biggest takeaway from the series was that it's one of the most unknown themes of the Bible, yet it's in every part of the story. Tim is so great at presenting stuff like that. He makes it fascinating, and yet so accessible. Our podcast episode, The Jewish Exile: How it Made the Bible, was our ninth most downloaded episode with 112,000 downloads.

**MHH:** *Whoa! That's crazy.*

**DD:** Yeah, I've been so impressed with the receptivity of the audience. Even when Tim introduces these unexpected themes or ideas, I'm always surprised at how receptive people are. There's not a lot of backlash or negativity.

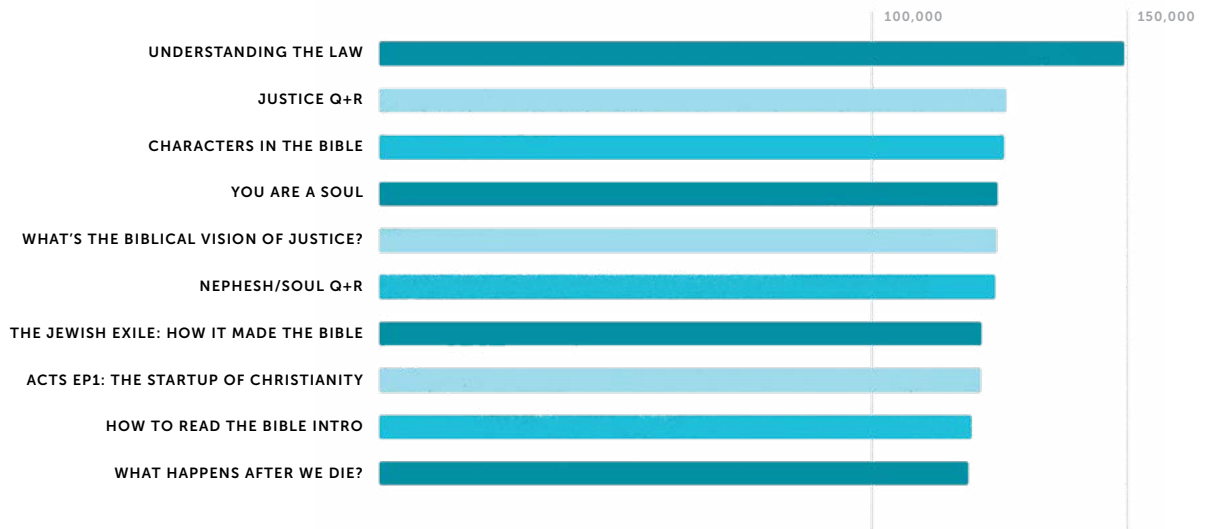
**MHH:** *Do you see a lot of this same type of reception on YouTube?*

**DD:** Well YouTube is a little different, and when comments get really nasty or are disrespectful, I'll usually remove those. But I keep in lively and colorful discussion. There were a lot of those, especially on the Job series, and it's an important way to be able to engage. But honestly, we do still have a lot of positive response. YouTube measures sentiment trends, and 86% of our comments are positive. It was awesome to see how people responded to the Exile video on YouTube. One of the most common words from the comments was "beautiful." And it is a really beautiful video. It's different in style and tone from a lot of our stuff, and the audience really responded to it.

**MHH:** *That's amazing. It's such a beautiful video. Before you go, can you give us a brief overview of our podcast audience?*

**DD:** Yeah, most of the podcast listeners are from the US, then Australia, Canada, so it's mainly English speaking countries where we have

## Top Podcast Episodes



most of our listeners. And Portland has the most downloads per city at about 438,000, which isn't surprising.

**MHH:** *We win! What was the most popular episode of the podcast?*

**DD:** Understanding the Law Part 1. People were really intrigued with that one. But the second is the Justice Q+R. The Q+R episodes are consistently really popular episodes.

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It was a pleasure to talk with Danny and get an inside look at how our audience is responding to the podcast. It's encouraging to see so many that are eager to learn more about the unified story of the Bible. You can find all of our podcast episodes at [jointhebibleproject.com/podcasts](https://jointhebibleproject.com/podcasts).

MAKENZIE HALBERT-HOWEN



GALLERY

# Atmosphere of Exile

BY MATTHEW HALBERT-HOWEN

**The Exile video introduces how the concept of home evolves when a group is both taken from and returned again to their land. The aesthetic in the Exile video exemplifies the difference between home and exile.**









**HOME** Home is represented by "the gold world." The color palette is made up of golds and yellows. It's bright and filled with warm scenes of rolling hills and lush vegetation. The ground is soft, and the air is glowing. There are slowly-rising particles in the atmosphere, and the imagery is peaceful and inviting. The recurring image is of a couple resting under a shady tree.



**EXILE** In contrast to the gold world, exile is dark and confusing. Everything is blue and black, and even the horizon is dark. The ground is a hard, jagged maze. It's otherworldly too, as if you're not only away from your homeland while in

exile, you're away from anything recognizable. There are particles in the air in the blue world, but they're sharp, ash-like, and blown down in stormy gusts. Nothing is growing in exile.











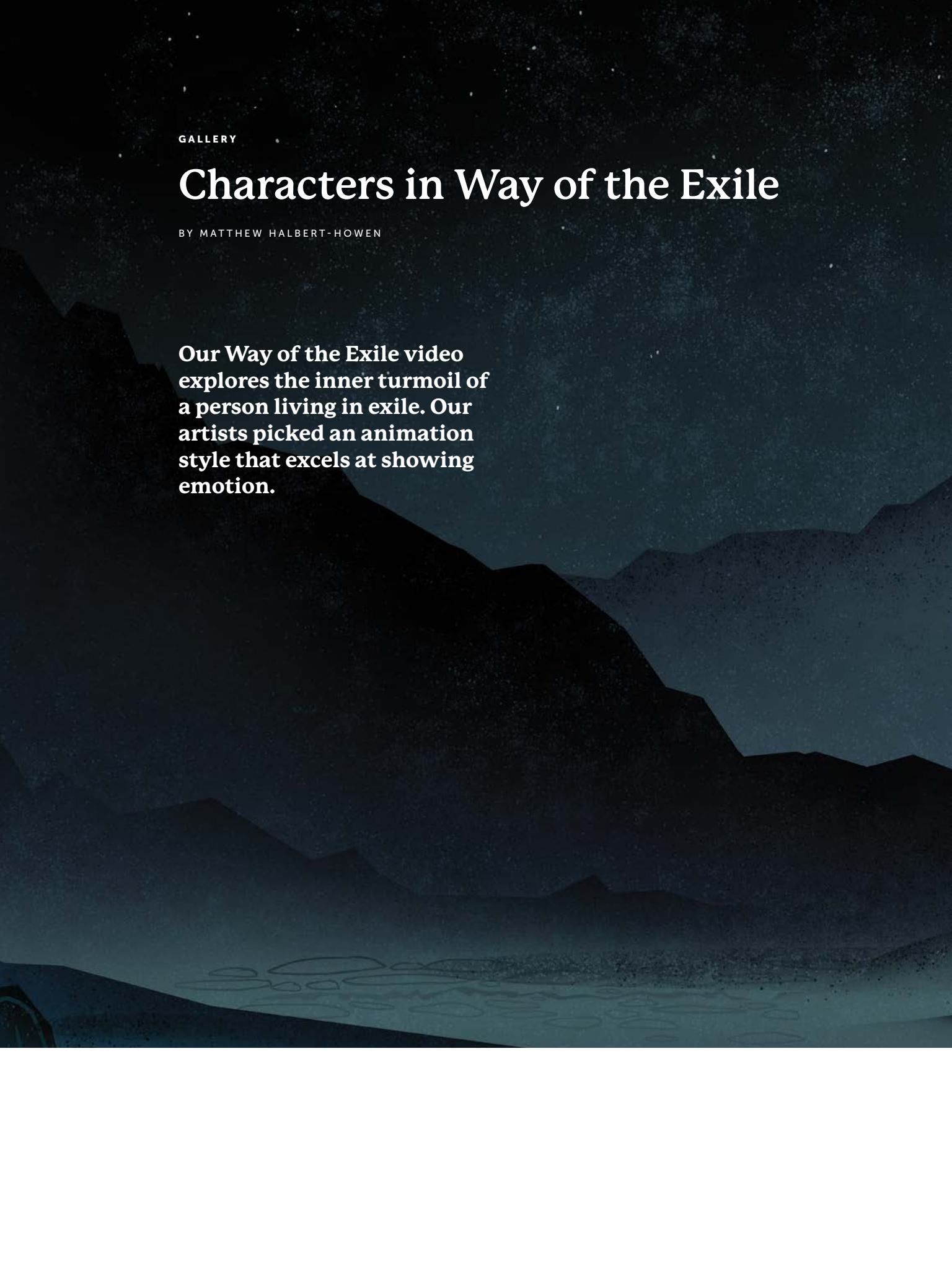


**EXILE-HOME  
HYBRID**

The most striking scenes in the video are when the blue world and the gold world intersect. The warm bird's nest that opens the video is disrupted by the blue snake. Adam and Eve walk away from the gold world into a blue labyrinth.







GALLERY

# Characters in Way of the Exile

BY MATTHEW HALBERT-HOWEN

**Our Way of the Exile video explores the inner turmoil of a person living in exile. Our artists picked an animation style that excels at showing emotion.**





**FRAME-BY-FRAME** Instead of relying on software to animate characters, every frame in the video is hand-drawn. It's more labor intensive, but it creates more believable characters.


**BODY LANGUAGE**

We read people first by how they hold themselves. To give the characters greater depth in *Way of the Exile*, we put extra time into fine-tuning the posture and movement of each character. The final product looks effortless, but one short scene could take days of work.



**EYES** Most animated characters and cartoons have over-sized eyes. Big eyes make it easy to read emotion. For this video we chose to make the characters' eyes stand out using

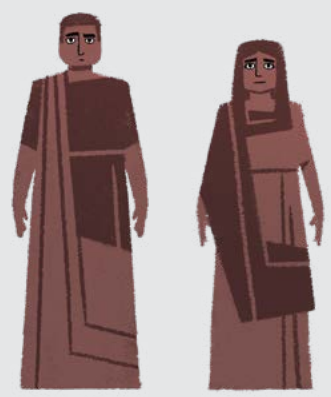
scale and contrast. While the body is drawn with light and dark colors, the eyes are drawn in black and white.



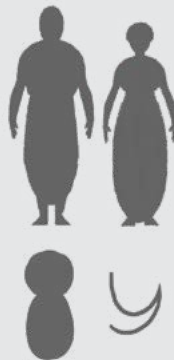
MACEDONIANS



SELEUCIDS



ROMANS







ASSYRIANS



BABYLONIANS



ISRAELITES



**CHARACTER SHAPE** As we started working on this video, we knew we were going to be representing different cultures and even different time periods. We wanted the cultures to be quickly recognizable so each culture has a unique body shape and clothing design.









EDEN

FEATURE

# PATTERNS OF EXILE

BY MATTHEW & MAKENZIE HALBERT-HOWEN

**In Tim Mackie's office there are bookshelves to the ceiling, a desk which is usually covered in notes and dictionaries, and whiteboards covered in Greek and Hebrew. We sent Matthew to hear what Tim is learning about the theme of exile in the storyline of the Bible.**

*What you'll read below is a summary of a conversation, so it ebbs and flows like two people talking rather than moving point-by-point like a formal essay.*

Tim started off by showing how the entire Biblical story is made up of a series of smaller stories that all follow the same basic cycle: home, exile, and return. And this cycle has been woven into every level of the Bible's narrative. You can see it in the overall plotline of the Bible (macro-level), but also in the medium-level stories of the ancestors in Genesis, or the drama of Israel in the promised land. The cycle is also worked out on the micro-level in stories about individual characters like Abraham, Jacob, or David. You can see how this theme is a design pattern that

the biblical authors used throughout all of Scripture, so that every person's individual story became a miniature expression of the overall narrative. It's about the sense of belonging that we experience in a place that feels like "home." It's about life's painful moments that force us into a kind of "exile," where everything is foreign and disorienting. And it's about the longing for home and the hope of return. You can go from Eden to Babylon, from Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph, to Moses and the exodus, or from Egypt, into the promised land, and then to Babylonian exile, where you read about the prophetic hope of the new Jerusalem. Every part of the Bible is aware of this pattern.

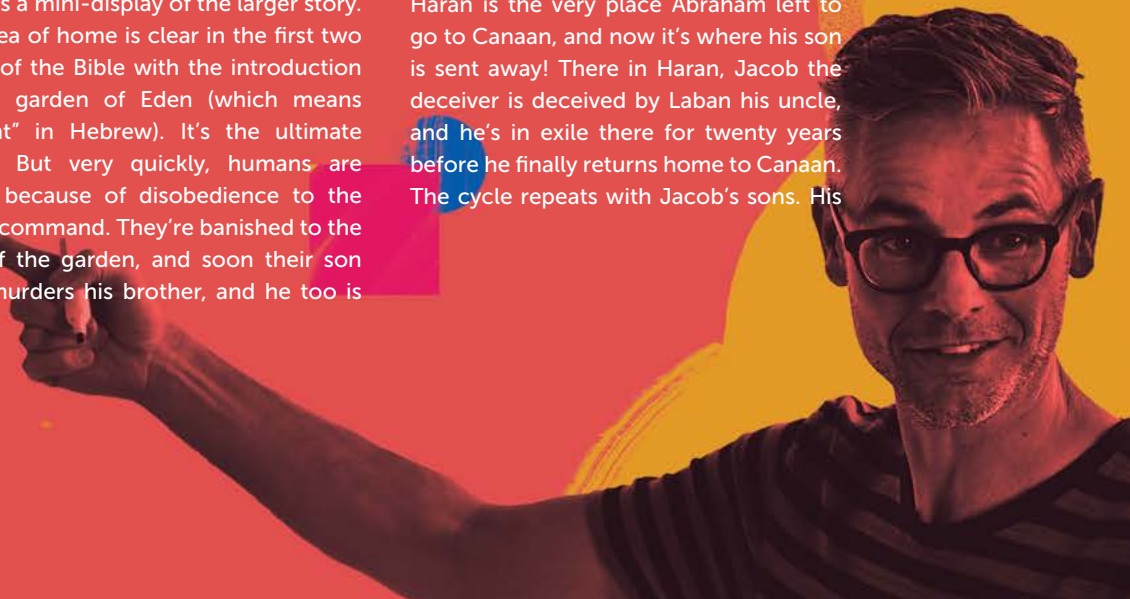


This is the power of the biblical narrative: it's about the human condition and future hope, so we can all identify with this story in very personal ways. The fact that it gets played out on an individual level in dozens of biblical characters is an invitation for us to begin seeing our own life stories as participating in this grander narrative.

There are multiple iterations of this theme in Genesis, and Tim suggests that the repetition is intentional. The biblical authors are training the reader by showing the same pattern over and over, so that you begin to see each character's story as a mini-display of the larger story. The idea of home is clear in the first two pages of the Bible with the introduction of the garden of Eden (which means "delight" in Hebrew). It's the ultimate home! But very quickly, humans are exiled because of disobedience to the divine command. They're banished to the east of the garden, and soon their son Cain murders his brother, and he too is

In the overall arc of Genesis 1-11, humanity has been exiled from their home and is now living in Babylon. But the next movement begins with God calling Abraham out of Babylon and into a new "home," the land of Canaan. And so this land becomes the newest iteration of the "Eden-home." God invites Abraham to re-experience Eden in Canaan. However, almost immediately after he arrives, he doubts God's power and leaves the land in a self-imposed exile and goes to Egypt where he deceives the king and endangers his wife! Despite Abraham's mistake, God previews Israel's exodus story by rescuing Abraham from Egypt and bringing him back to Canaan. In just the first chapter of Abraham's story, he repeats the cycle: home, failure leading to exile, God's mercy opening a way back home.

Another great example is Jacob's story. Like Abraham who deceived the king of Egypt, Jacob, along with his mom, deceives his own father and brother. This forces Jacob to flee into exile in the land of Haran, and so the pattern repeats itself. Haran is the very place Abraham left to go to Canaan, and now it's where his son is sent away! There in Haran, Jacob the deceiver is deceived by Laban his uncle, and he's in exile there for twenty years before he finally returns home to Canaan. The cycle repeats with Jacob's sons. His



older sons hate their younger brother Joseph, and their sin ends up leading the whole family into an exile down in Egypt, where they live for generations.

So the book of Genesis is a whole series of exile stories, leading up to an exile in Egypt. And because of all of that, we can see that in the bigger picture, the Israelites' exodus from Egypt is also a return from exile; it's a homecoming story. And then once the people finally get into the land of Canaan (and that's a complicated series of exiles as well), the pattern replays itself again.

## The Israelite Cycle

In the land of Canaan, the tribes of Israel unite and then eventually divide again. The northern tribes violate their covenant with God and are exiled to the east in Assyria. A little over a century later, the southern tribes do the same, and they too are exiled to the east in Babylon. However, the remnant of this southern tribe group (Judah) that was exiled in Babylon returns to the land. This is what the book of Ezra-Nehemiah is all about: it's a homecoming story. But as you read on, the "home" they return to is not Eden, or even like the Canaan of the past. The exiles return to a land of danger, foreign oppression, and slavery. In fact, in all of the previous stories of people "coming home," the home to which they return is always a diminished version of the place they left. So now as the exiles return to what was supposed to be their new Eden, their hopes are dashed.

After the return in Ezra-Nehemiah, the reader finds themselves waiting for something more. This is where the Old Testament prophets come into play. They depict Israel waiting for a new exodus and yet another return from exile. All of the places of exile in the earlier stories are

merged together as if they're one thing: the east is like Babylon, is like Egypt, is like Haran, is like Assyria, is like the land of the Philistines, and so on. Symbolically, on this narrative cycle, they all stand for the same kind of place. So when we get to the Gospels and hear Jesus saying that God's Kingdom has arrived, we are meant to see this as another iteration of the pattern. Except this time, humanity's true "home" has arrived here in the midst of "exile," and Jesus is at the center of it all.

## Exile in the New Testament

In Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of God, he makes clear that his followers are to see themselves as living in exile and return. The Kingdom is here! But it's also something that we are still waiting for. Later in the New Testament, the apostle Peter calls followers of Jesus "exiles and foreigners" (1 Peter 1:1-2). The Kingdom is now and not yet. This language draws on this persistent theme of exile in the Bible. This age that we're living in is represented by Egypt and Babylon, and God's Kingdom becomes the new Eden-Jerusalem, our true home that Jesus claims is breaking into our exile home.

Jesus uses this language of exile all throughout his teachings. Think about his parables and how many of them feature someone who has to leave their home, or who leaves and then returns only to find non-ideal conditions. He's using and creatively riffing on this biblical pattern of exile. It's clear that for Jesus, Israel's exile isn't about geography. It's about a spiritual and symbolic reality as Israel and all humanity wait for God to redeem our exiled world and restore it to become a true home.

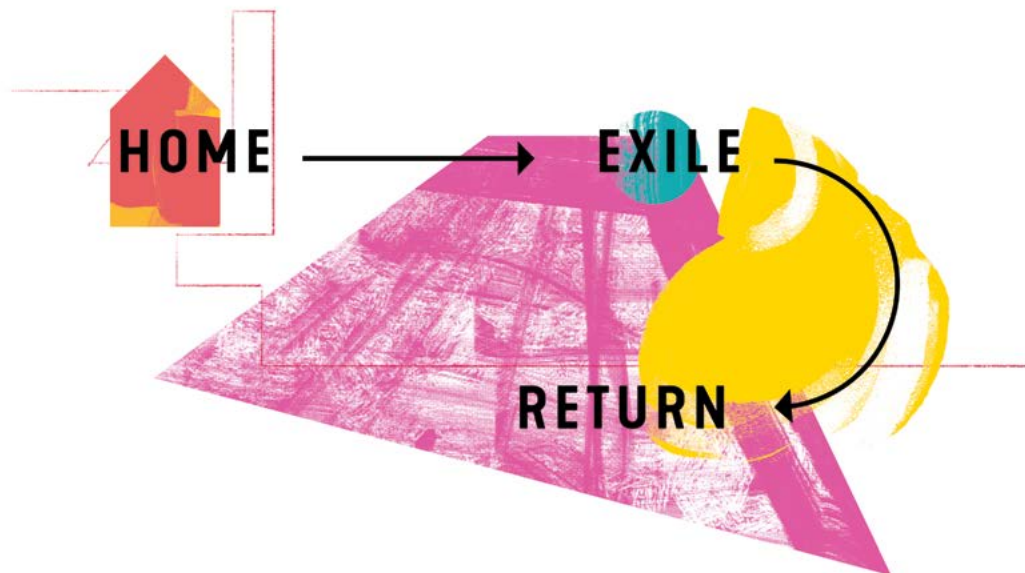
It's best to think of the exile theme not as a straight line, but rather as a spiral: the same paradigm playing out multiple

times, but not endlessly. Each repetition builds on the previous leading towards a culmination. And the finality of the Kingdom, the restoration of Eden and Jerusalem, this is what Jesus was announcing and bringing into reality.

Something important Tim pointed out is that in all of the “return” stories (of Abraham, Jacob, or Ezra-Nehemiah), the place to which they return is never the former full glory of home. It’s a return to a diminished version of God’s plan. But at the end of the macro-level story of the Bible, the goal is to finally experience everything that Eden and the New Jerusalem stand for. But if you think about it, Eden and the new Jerusalem are different kinds of places. One is a city, and the other is a garden.

## The Evolution of Return

As you read the biblical story, each repetition of the “home-exile-return” pattern adds a new dimension to the portrait of “home.” This is why we have two very different images that begin and end the story of Scripture: the Eden garden and the Jerusalem city. This reflects humanity’s story in Genesis 1-11, as their goal was to build a new city and civilization after exile from the garden. Except the city that was made was no Eden, it was Babylon, an anti-Eden. And so the biblical story ends not just with a new Eden, but with a garden-city. The new Jerusalem is the true fulfillment of what humans were looking for when they built Babylon, and it’s also a restored version of every portrait of home throughout the story of Scripture.





This tells us something about God's nature and how he partners with us. Once humanity has done something, even if it's stupid and sinful, God then commits to working within that trajectory. So the humans want to build cities? That's one way to be fruitful and multiply. It's not the only way, but it's where humanity went, and so now God will work within the framework of growing and redeeming this city. So the people of Israel want a king? It's going to be a disaster, but God works within Israel's monarchy, despite knowing the destruction it would bring. The monarchy and the city brings only ruin in the story, but imagine what a redeemed, Eden-like version could look like. That's what the garden-city in the book of Revelation is all about.

There's something really comforting about that. It suggests that every season of human history and of our own lives fits into some culminating moment that God has in store. No experiences of loss will be wasted; it all fits into the final picture. So what we're hoping for is not to return to infancy or to the garden of Eden. We are longing to return to everything we've been striving for. It's our whole life experience that will be redeemed.

## Why Exile?

The various repetitions of the transition from "home" to "exile," from Eden to Babylon, are always moments of human failure and rebellion. Abraham left Canaan because of his lack of faith in God. Jacob was exiled because of his deceit. His sons were exiled to Egypt because of their jealousy and violence. Their stupid decisions have these unforeseen consequences that land them in exile. Throughout the Bible, there's a variety of portraits for how people end up in exile, and that's part of what makes it such a powerful theme.

Look at the book of Judges. Here we're shown seven reenactments of this pattern. Israel is in the land at peace, but never for long. These flawed humans in the book of Judges repeat the Genesis 1-11 pattern over and over again. The seven cycles in Judges are similar, but never identical. In fact, the reader sees the unique meaning of each cycle by paying attention to how they differ. One generation is exiled because of idolatry, another for cowardice, another for deceit, and another due to lust for power and sex. The biblical authors are creatively riffing off this pattern in every story and generation. It actually becomes more and more creative as it develops.

The story of David gets really creative with the pattern. David undergoes a "home-exile-return" cycle multiple times. He's anointed by Samuel and overcomes Goliath. He's living in the land, and everyone loves him (home). But then because of Saul's sin, he has to flee into the wilderness of Judah (exile). Eventually Saul is killed, and David goes to the land of Judah where he's proclaimed king (return), but then his own sin with Bathsheba blows everything up. This leads to the betrayal of Absalom, which forces him to flee into the same wilderness of Judah all over again (exile). And when he returns to the throne, it's to a diminished Jerusalem and failing bodily strength (return).

Every iteration of the pattern explores the reality of the human condition in a different way. Abraham's story might not land with you, but Jacob's or Davids' might. In all of these portraits, you can find different parts of your own life experience.

Nothing in the Tanak/Old Testament resolves the fundamental exile from Eden. Every generation is suffering in some kind of exile until the great showdown between God and Babylon and Pharaoh, the archetypes of the exilic overlord. Just



like the different stories of people ending up in exile, the modes of returning home are also different. For Abraham, God brought judgment on Egypt to return him to his home, and that's how it happens in Exodus as well, as Pharaoh sends the Israelites away because of the plagues. When Jacob flees from his exile, Laban chases him, and God protects Jacob despite his deception. When David returns home to Jerusalem, it's because of the loss of his son Absalom. This is the creativity of the biblical narrative where no two of these exile narratives are the same.

The biblical authors are balancing two goals when they present us with their narratives. They want both to portray the history of their people but also to help readers understand its meaning and purpose within God's plan for the world. They want us to see how their history speaks to the human condition as a whole, and this is where we need to better learn how to appreciate the Bible as a creative literary work.

The point of all these exile-homecoming stories is for the reader to see that they are participating in this same story. We're all humans exiled from the ideal and anticipating the ultimate version of home. And the claim of this biblical story is that the return from exile has begun with the coming of Jesus, and it is yet to be fulfilled in a complete restoration. So in this moment, followers of Jesus are like Daniel, living in Babylon and striving to be faithful in light of the hope of our return home. But living in Babylon is hard, as we try not to exalt it as our true hope and also recognize it as a signpost pointing to our ultimate home.

It's like the way the prophets consistently use childbirth as a key metaphor for this waiting and hopeful anticipation. It's an event that is transformative, painful, and unpredictable. The anticipation of the event is often just as formative as the event itself, and that's what the Christian life is really about, living in the now and not yet of our return to the full glory of the new Jerusalem.

# The Translations Before the Storm

BY DONALD E. ARNEY

**In our winter issue of *The Quarterly*, Donald Arney described the early phases of our growing localization efforts. Here he updates us on the journey to date and where it's taking us.**

You may be similar to me, a maturing and curious lifelong learner who imagines they're mostly in step with the jitterbug of today's cultural currents and technological waves. I know who Netflix is. And I once hailed a fellow citizen for an early ride home by using something called an "app."

Still, I was surprised by the immediate effect.

On July 3, 2018, I quietly released nine translated videos to our Spanish YouTube channel. I watched, in real time, as viewers caught hold. John had 53 views in the minute it took me to get Luke Part 1 ready for upload, which in turn garnered 76 views in the bit of time it took to launch Part 2. Within an hour, we had registered thousands of views on our brand-new videos. And while these results may not impress the folks who crunch the numbers for our massive English channel, to me this tidbit of Romance Language datametrics was as close to real excitement as we get in the rather staid confines of the localization department.







Late last year, a volunteer team based in the Dominican Republic and funded by a local supporter began working diligently to translate and post a handful of our videos in Spanish. Bolstered by the generosity of our donors, we approached them in the spring of this year with the challenge of producing our Read Scripture series on a much more aggressive schedule. With our financial help in hand, they unflinchingly set straight to work. That work began to pay off as soon as we launched our first Spanish video.

Before early July, the Spanish channel had settled in at about 17,000 subscribers and wasn't showing much movement. As I write this in early September, and after posting only fifteen of the seventy-three Read Scripture videos, the channel has well over 85,000 subscribers, and the rate at which people are finding and subscribing continues to grow as we add content.

I often wonder if people who are in the middle of notable events realize it at the time or if they only glimpse the scale of their efforts in the reflections of hindsight. Is it really ever possible to catch that particular lightning and contain it for later study? At the third rehearsal, did the

original cast of *Hamilton* have any idea of what was to come? I know I often narrow my personal view to the specific tasks of a project, and I can lose awareness of the larger dynamics around it. But I feel very comfortable saying that in doing the conceptually small task of translating our works, we are taking part in something large and incredible and worthwhile. The Spanish results are an early and brilliant indicator of great things to come.

To some extent, we were lucky with Spanish. Once our team decided we were ready to fund Spanish translations, there was a qualified and self-motivated (but underfunded) team of translators, editors, animators, producers, and voice talent already in place. Their efforts had already built a significant audience for the channel. Our main role was and continues to be acting as a conduit for the hopes of the donors from around the globe who continue to give so generously to our project.

Of course, easy success always goes to the dance with unexpected challenges. As we've stretched out to other locales, we've encountered roadblocks, some amusing, some daunting, and they often put our work into revealing perspective.

Hindi comes to mind. Here's an interesting tidbit for you: There's almost no good time for a conference call with people who are 12.5 hours ahead of you. Mumbai has a .5 hour split in their time zone (GMT+5:30). Also there are monsoon rains and a language so entwined with its own religious history that it has almost no native Christian terminology. The life of a localizer is never dull.

Amusing doesn't always describe our challenges, however.

Our Hindi efforts are supported largely by the incredible work and donations of an American church group. They sent a team to visit our Portland studio earlier this year to create a short video of our progress. To that end, I asked our team in Mumbai if they might like to create a short introductory video of their own to share. Politely as he could, the team lead for the Hindi effort let me know that because of discriminations both subtle and overt against Christians in his area of the world, his team wasn't comfortable being shown on camera.

I had to stop for a second.

Oh...right...I could have foreseen this, but, of course, I didn't. I have the privilege of showing up for my job every day without worrying if someone will take offense or disagree with what I'm doing. I can tell my dentist's receptionist out loud that I work for The Bible Project because I don't have to worry about being overheard in a waiting room. My cousins won't tell me I'm making myself a professional pariah next time they're over for Sunday supper. Yeah, I really, really should have seen this coming.

But these issues that deal more with day-to-day realities, as opposed to my steady and studied professional idealisms, often catch me by surprise. I was on a call with my Serbian contact in

Belgrade. I asked him how he was. Fine, he said, except for a small thing. His fourteen-year-old son's mates chase him home daily yelling at him that he's a Christian and Christians get killed in this neighborhood.

Again...you just have to stop for a second.

What did he say? Did he just say that? I have a fourteen-year-old boy at home. His name is Story, and his mates don't do that. The don't do anything remotely like that. How can that be the reality for any fourteen-year-old?

And with that, we segued into a professional chat about files and fonts and transcripts. The tribulations that some of our teams live through just in the pursuit of working with us can, does, and should give us a chance to review how important it is that we do what we do and continue to do it.

We are moving localization efforts forward in many locales around the globe, even as requests for new languages stack up in our email inboxes. Often our best teams are our volunteer teams. In Europe, we've been blessed by the work of a German team that continues to faithfully produce their versions of our videos and launch them on a regular basis. Where we don't have organically occurring teams, we strive to use our blessings to fill the vacuum. We begin with a lengthy process of identifying and then testing production groups.

Such was the case with French. After a long period of checking with our colleagues, emailing potential teams, and then onboarding two successful groups, we have started a uniquely trans-European operation to answer the call for French translations. Animation and voiceover of our Read Scripture series will be managed out of Switzerland by a team using their Portuguese office for

## ***El Proyecto Biblia* YouTube Channel Viewership**



most of the work. In Paris, our Subject Matter Expert will be reviewing all translations for consistency, and a team of additional animators will begin work on our other videos. Look to see most of our library up on our French YouTube channel within the year.

Speaking of Portuguese, we have also identified two teams to help us with our Brazilian work. This time it's a pairing of a long-time partnership with a global Christian broadcasting group and a team that came to our attention when they emailed our general account and said they were interested in helping. We never know from where the next opportunity to partner with a new team will come. But come it will.

We are following additional leads around the globe as we focus on expanding our list of supported languages. Longtime partners have started translation work on Arabic, Korean, and Farsi. A new partner is hard at work on Polish translations. A

Russian studio that steadfastly chased us for over a year finally has translations to work with, and they are producing localized videos. We currently have dozens of Telugu videos in review prior to final release. A volunteer Turkish team continues to come together and should be producing videos soon.


As we look forward to the next year in localization, we know we'll be seeing a lot of translated videos going up on YouTube between now and next summer. We'll also continue to identify languages that we want to support, and we'll go after them. We're refining our vetting processes and engaging new partners to help us with our growing pains.

By my next update, we should have more successful translation cases such as the Spanish to discuss. We'll also be applying lessons learned to help us speed our processes and more quickly identify teams to help. And I'm looking forward to going over some cool analytics from the numbers folks that will show us where our current audiences are and where we're growing them. All of this to answer an increasing call from all corners of the world for local versions of our videos, which, as I understand it, will also be available on an "app."

Talk to you soon.

DONALD E. ARNEY





ARTIST FEATURE

# Josh Espasandin

BY MATTHEW HALBERT-HOWEN

**Josh is one of the animators at TBP, and he specializes in character animation, which means he's either moving something the illustrators have drawn, or he's animating a character frame-by-frame by drawing it over and over again. I sat down with him this summer to learn more about his work.**

Josh started in November 2015 at the tail end of the Torah series. We were working on Deuteronomy, and the first scene he animated was a scene with these tiny little Israelites that were essentially blocks with stick legs moving across the screen. It was a fairly easy start.

He was a year out of school and really excited to find a studio so focused on storytelling. He wanted to be animating stories and not just working on commercials or something with very little meaning to it. At TBP, he's found a studio where he gets to work on characters and stories that have a big impact on a lot of people.

He wasn't always sure he was going to go into animation. He grew up with animated videos, the classic Disney films, but didn't realize that making those videos was actually a job he could do. He initially wanted to go to school for graphic design, but once his admissions counselor asked him what he liked to do, he explained that he wanted to draw characters and write stories that went along with them. She tried to steer him towards the animation program, but he

wasn't interested. He thought it would be tedious and really hard, but luckily, she took him to the animation department. Josh saw the art they were putting up, how they all worked together as a team, that it wasn't any one person designing everything, and he was really inspired by how much everyone collaborated. He knew he wanted to be a part of something bigger.

One of the reasons he loves working at TBP is because the story of the Bible is the story that has impacted him the most. He's thought about working on side projects where he can tell his own stories, but for now, the work at TBP is really satisfying.

Josh worked on the Exile video as well as Way of the Exile. Exile was really interesting because there was zero character animation. It was very atmospheric. He got to stretch other muscles on this video. The team wanted the Exile video to feel like the scenes were still in the process of being painted, so Josh worked on designing how that paint-on effect looked. There were also some particles in the air that showed depth and the movement of the wind, and he worked on that animation as well.

The Way of the Exile video was an opposite experience for him. It's completely focused on characters. They're moving and emotive, and they're going to be drawn frame-by-frame. Each new pose is a new drawing.


I was curious as to the amount of work that went into that type of animation. Most films are twenty-four frames per second (FPS). With animation, typically there's a new position every one to two frames, so you're seeing twelve to twenty-four drawings per second. They are actually going to cut that in half and draw on the fours, so in this video there

will only be about six drawings for every second. It'll be a little more choppy, but it'll emphasize the expressions and body language of the characters a bit more. It'll save some production time.

It seemed like a ton of work, and I was curious as to how much Josh typically gets done in a day. He said that a lot of the time that goes into this process is spent planning and roughing out concepts. He can sometimes spend a whole day on one scene, making sure that he gets the movements looking natural, getting the facial expressions conveying what he wants them to convey. After that he'll submit it for review, and when it's approved, then it's time to draw the final art for each frame.

The most misunderstood part of animation is how long the process takes. Everything is made from scratch. They make the actors, they make the settings, they make the movements. Sometimes he'll draw from reference, meaning he'll video himself doing the action he wants to recreate. His goal is to make the animation understandable to the viewer. He explains that everything is exaggerated in comparison to real-life movements. If you traced a video of someone, it would look really strange. You'll notice that eyes and the eyebrows are almost always bigger. It's not just a style, it's a design that helps the viewer read the emotion on the character's face quickly. The eyes let the viewer see what's going on inside the character's mind.

I asked if Josh had any advice for people who want to do what he does. There are a ton of online resources. Even though he went to college, that's not the best path for everyone. There's a lot of great stuff out there that can be found just by googling. The other really important thing, Josh explained, is learning how to



Being able to work with a team—  
taking criticism without taking it personally—  
is so important to being an animator.

ask for and accept feedback. Animation is a team-oriented industry. If you're not a team player, it doesn't matter how good you are, you probably won't last long. Being able to work with a team—taking criticism without taking it personally—is so important to being an animator.

The hardest part of the job is probably trying to put out work that the rest of the team can understand and get on board with and is consistent with what everyone else is doing. Josh explained that you can't be a lone animator working in whatever style you want. You have to make work that fits with the team's project. The team often sees your work in a different way than you do, and lining up with everyone else can be difficult.

I asked Josh if there were any easter eggs or insider secrets to the work he does that our audience might enjoy. He pointed out the many interpretations of one character that we have across all our videos: Jesus specifically. Looking at what Jesus looks like in different art styles can be really interesting. Not many studios have the opportunity to create the same characters over and over again

in a variety of styles. Also check out David, Moses, Adam, and Eve. They're all different in different videos. Oh, and for whatever reason, there are Furbies. They show up every once in a while. (Look at Day of the Lord and Image of God).

Crowd funding is a pretty unusual model for an animation studio. Josh wants to keep making believable characters that people can connect with and be inspired by. He wants to be able to create sincere characters that aren't trying to push an agenda. It's humbling to get to work at TBP because there are people out there supporting us. The fact that we're still open is very encouraging. It means a lot of people are interested in learning more about the Bible and really appreciative of the art that we make.

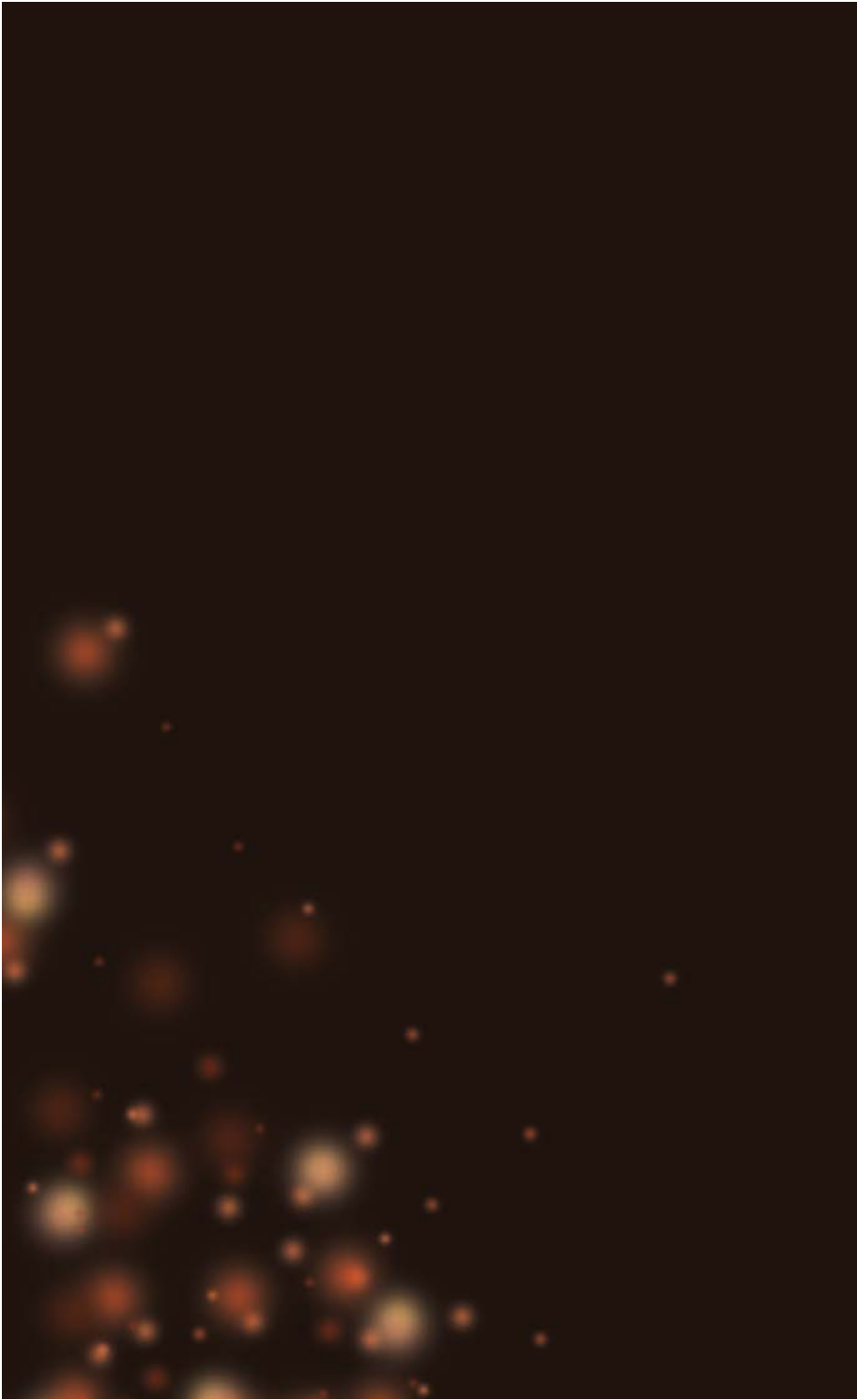
MATTHEW HALBERT-HOWEN





OPPOSITE: FRAMES OF ABEDNEGO ANIMATION FROM WAY OF THE EXILE

TOP & BOTTOM: JOSH WORKING AT HIS DESK ON CHARACTER DESIGN  
FOR WAY OF THE EXILE



GEEK OUT

# Jerusalem Has Fallen: Despair & Hope

BY TIM MACKIE & AERON SULLIVAN

**For followers of Jesus, the story of his life, death, and resurrection is the absolute center of our practice, belief, and worldview. It's the central event which generated the entire Christian story and the New Testament. However, these events didn't occur in a vacuum.**

Jesus saw himself fulfilling a larger storyline that was told in his Bible, the Hebrew Bible, or as most Christians refer to it, the Old Testament. One of the most important events in Jesus' Bible, which also changed Jewish history forever, is the Babylonian exile. This event left its mark on Israelite history in an unparalleled manner and played a key role in the formation of the Bible itself. For the Israelites, the exile was the watershed moment of their history on which the entire Bible gains its significance; everything else orbits around the gravity of this faith-shaking moment.

The entire national structure of the kingdom, which was thought to be ordained by God himself, came crashing down. This event fulfilled centuries of prophetic warnings, as hundreds of years of tradition, culture, and history were destroyed in just one year. This was their Day of the Lord, and it left them absolutely devastated.

Read the book of Lamentations if you want some somber reflection on what it felt like to live through the tragedy of Jerusalem's destruction and the people's enslavement under Babylonian rule. You can understand how it may be hard to find hope in such a situation. That is why the book of Isaiah plays such a key role in the Old Testament, especially given its placement in the ordering of the Hebrew Bible. Isaiah was intentionally placed immediately after Kings, as opposed to Song of Songs in the Christian ordering, in order to inspire hope following the tragic conclusion of Kings—the exile. Isaiah's entire focus is hope on the other side of the exile. From the very first chapter of the book, this hope shines bright, and it comes right on the heels of the most devastating moment in Israelite history. Let's first explore the exile and then the hope we find in Isaiah.



## DESPAIR

Yahweh was eternally committed to his promises to Abraham, Israel, and David, which means he was committed to dismantling Israel's kingdoms if they were unfaithful to their covenant obligations. God would allow Israel's national structures to be wiped out, so that he could create a faithful remnant who would return and be faithful (see Isaiah 10:21). God is faithful to his promises, those that come in the form of blessings and those that come in the form of punishment and exile. The Israelites made a promise long ago in Moses' day. If they were loyal to their God and to each other, he would bless them and make them his treasured possession. However, if they rebelled and did not keep his covenant, he would turn his back on them, at least temporarily. As Deuteronomy 28:36-37 says,

**The LORD will exile you and your king to a nation unknown to you and your ancestors. There in exile you will worship gods of wood and stone! You will become an object of horror, ridicule, and mockery among all the nations to which the LORD sends you.**

Ouch. Hindsight being what it is, one could say God was faithful to that promise even in his correction and punishment. But that was a long time ago, right? You could have expected the Israelites to forget such a promise/warning. But they didn't just have ancient scrolls to remember, they also had the living, breathing prophets getting in their faces on a regular basis. For centuries the prophets had been warning Israel and their kings. As you read through the rest of the books of the prophets, you'll discover just how widespread Israel's corruption and covenant failure had become.

Before the end, kings like Hezekiah and Josiah tried their hands at reform and even took a few steps forward, but it was too little too late. The king who came in between these two, Manasseh, took Israel's apostasy to a new level, unparalleled in the family of David.

**The Lord spoke by His servants the prophets, saying, "Because Manasseh, king of Judah, has done these abominations, things more evil than all that the Amorites did and has also caused Judah to sin with his idols, therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel: I am bringing evil on Jerusalem and Judah, such evil that the ears of whoever hears about it will tingle. I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the level of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes out a bowl, wiping it and turning it upside down. I will disregard the remnant of My inheritance and give them into the hand of their enemies. They shall become plunder and spoil for all their enemies, because they have done evil in My sight and have provoked Me to anger, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day.**

**2 KINGS 20:10-15**

This is a hard message. Remember what happened to the northern kingdom in 722 BC? Samaria, under corrupt kings' ruling in the spirit of Ahab's ways, was hauled off into exile by the Assyrians. This is the same verdict and sentence rendered to Judah by Yahweh here. Five short chapters later, Jerusalem falls, systematically plundered, methodically enslaved. Every item they had amassed in their storehouses was removed. This was the Egyptian exile all over again, but they were not the ones collecting the goods, and they were not being set free (see 2 Kings 25).

Is this how it ends? The prophets before this event were considered crazy, but now their words of warning were vindicated. That is why the writings of the prophets grew in importance after the exile. Nobody was listening before their predictions came true. Surely God was on their side. Israel's kings were divinely appointed and mandated. They were untouchable; however, after the fall of Jerusalem, the tables were turned. The prophets were right, so what now?

## HOPE

Thankfully, Yahweh is faithful! If he was faithful to punish his people for disobedience, how much more faithful will he be to restore them and bring them blessings. We know that God will hold people accountable, but he's also "slow to anger, abounding in covenant faithfulness and forgiving of sin and rebellion" (Numbers 14:18). If we turn to the same speech given by Moses at the end of Deuteronomy that predicted the exile in the first place, we can see hope.

**When you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where He scattered you.**

**DEUTERONOMY 30:2-3**

Isaiah picks up this prophetic theme and runs with it. At first glance, it's easy to conclude that this first prophetic book is really disorganized, one moment warning Israel, the next moment promising blessing. Remember, you're reading literature from an ancient culture very different from your own. The poetry of Isaiah will constantly shift back and forth from judgment to hope with each cycle offering more detail than the previous.

In a vivid vision in Isaiah 6, the prophet is first purified by a hot coal and then prepared to go and prophesy against the nation and its leaders. We then discover he has just symbolically undergone the

same "purifying fire" that God is sending on all of Israel in the form of defeat before Assyria and then Babylon. "For there will be many forsaken places in the land, but one-tenth will remain left over, and even it will be subject to burning. But just as the terebinth or oak leaves a stump when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land" (Isaiah 6:12-13). There will be a remnant that remains on the other side of the exile, and it will be the holy seed from which a new kingdom will sprout.

In chapter 1, Isaiah reflects on the reasons for the exile (there are many!). But before the chapter closes, we find a glimmer of hope. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land" (Isaiah 1:18-19). Remember, the Lord has told his people himself that he will punish sin and judge the guilty, but nothing can stand between Yahweh and his commitment to corporate covenant faithfulness. "I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward, you shall be called the city of righteousness, a faithful town. Zion shall be redeemed with justice and her converts with righteousness. But the destruction of the transgressors and sinners shall be together, and those who forsake the Lord shall be consumed" (Isaiah 1:26-28). Yahweh may mean business, but he has not forgotten about Israel, and he clearly still intends to make them a blessing to all the nations and fulfill his promise to Abraham.

## ISAIAH RUNS DEEP

Let's remember that in the midst of all this doom and gloom, Isaiah kept the embers of hope lit. God has not lost his love for his covenant people, and he has not abandoned them. This leads us back to the peculiar concluding story of 2 Kings. In 2 Kings 25:27-30, the captive king from the line of David, Jehoiachin, is released from his Babylonian prison, exalted above all the other kings under Babylonian rule, and invited to sit and dine with the king of Babylon.

Now this is confusing. What exactly is going on here? Why are we being told this story? Think about the themes of this short episode. An imprisoned Israelite is taken into slavery in a foreign land. He is then suddenly released from prison by the king and exalted high above the other rulers of that land.

Sound familiar? You've heard this story before in the book of Genesis. The prisoner was Joseph, and you will also recall that he had to change his clothes before seeing the king in person, which is the same thing that happens in this short story about Jehoiachin. He replays the Joseph story to a t, and so this final story in 2 Kings invites us to see a similar divine purpose at work in the disaster of Jerusalem's destruction. Human evil will not have the day, and God's purposes will be fulfilled.

TIM MACKIE & AERON SULLIVAN

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APRIL 16, 2017

## Recommended Reading

*The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile*

DANIEL L. SMITH-CRISTOPHER

*Faith for This Moment: Navigating a Polarized World as the People of God*

RICK MCKINLEY

*Heaven: Biblical Answers to Common Questions*

RANDY ALCORN

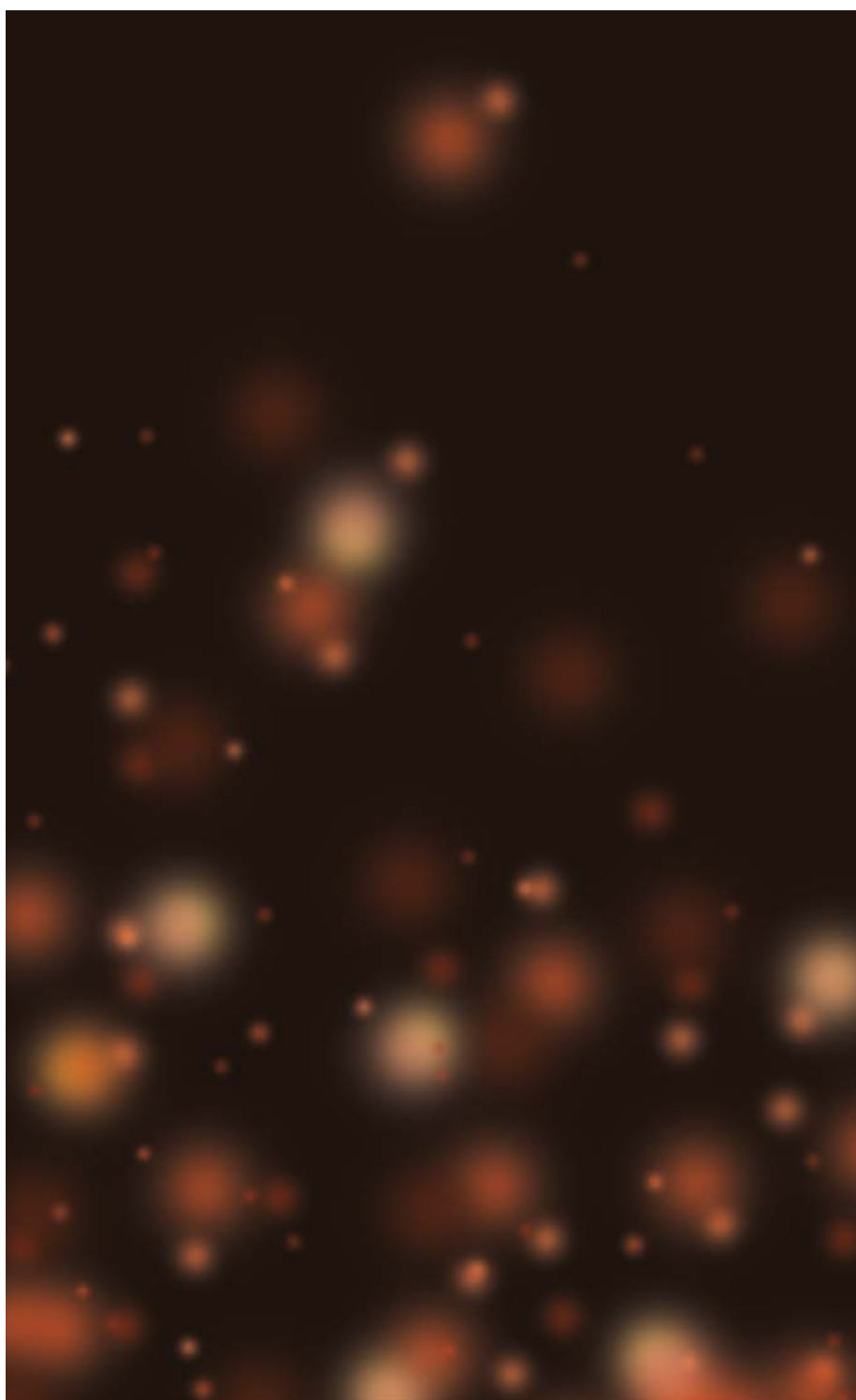
*The Weight of Glory*

C.S. LEWIS

*1 & 2 Kings: Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary*

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN





# Supporter Corner

We get letters, phone calls, and emails from people around the world using our videos. Here are a few of our favorites.

## ELENA

I love you guys. I wish I could express what an amazing ministry you have. I work at a faith-based recovery here in California. Most of our clients have never step foot in a church, let alone had the chance to study God's word. You guys really help bring it to life for them. Thank you.

## STELLA, AGE 7

I am Stella. I am 7. I am in second grade. I love the bible project. My dad and me watch it almost every night. Is there anyway I can help? I have some drawings you can animate. Also Jon in your Lev video you did the heart upside-down what's up with that dude?

DEAR bible project,  
I am Stella. I am 7. I  
am in Second grade. I love the  
bible project. My Dad and me  
watch it almost every night. Is there  
anyway I could help? I have some  
drawings you could animate. Also Jon in your  
Lev video you did the heart upside down  
what's up with that dude? Stella

**TINA**

Hi. I have been a steady listener to The Bible Project podcast & Exploring My Strange Bible for nearly a year now. I just downloaded one of your studies on my lunch hour and wow. I just wanted your team to know what a huge blessing ALL of what you do is. I haven't been this excited about His Word or this impacted by Truth in a while—and this is coming from a former

overseas missionary and mini-theologian. I feel like someone who is so parched she has shoved her mouth over a fire hydrant, but regrets that her mouth is too small and slow to consume it all. I love what you all do. Thanks for blessing me every day on my way to/from work as and now on my lunch hour as I "dig deeper" and "geek out."

**XAVIER, FLORIDA**

Greetings to All at The Bible Project!

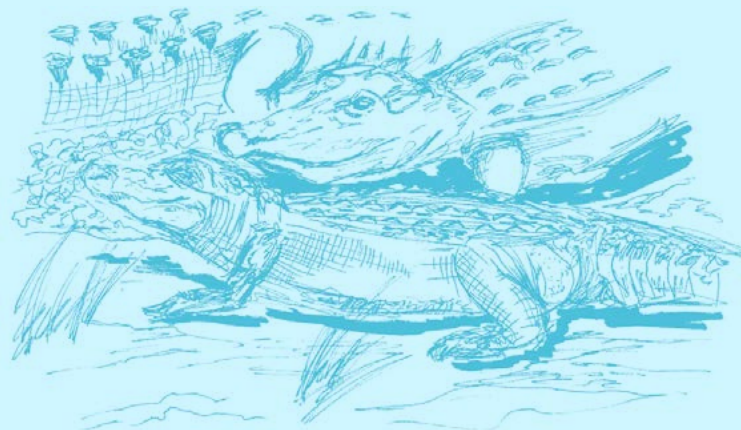
My background is in Biological Illustration, but more than that, I've been drawing and painting for as long as I can remember. Within the sphere of the churches I've attended in recent years, there have been many innovative ministries, but I have felt a lack of investment in the power of visual arts to bring people to Christ. Enter, The Bible Project. You have reinvigorated a spirit of creativity for Christ within me, and I find myself drawing my pastor's sermons and embarking on creating a new body of work that will see scientifically accurate illustrations of biblical flora and fauna within the contexts of their respective passages.

I finally was able to catch up on TBP Quarterlies yesterday, and I am in awe of all the attention to detail, theological digging,

and inspired collaboration that results in the creation of your videos, posters, and so much more. I currently am working as a freelance artist in Orlando, FL, and my ultimate passion is to share the Good News through visual arts, much like you all are currently doing.

I've attached one of my illustrations because after reading "Job Gets a Virtual Tour of God's World," in the Wisdom Quarterly, I was inspired to take stock of the natural world around me—the wonderfully and fearfully made things that surround me in Florida.

Thank you so much for your time, your efforts in this spectacular ministry, and your drive to make the Gospel accessible to so many.





EXCERPT FROM *FAITH FOR THIS MOMENT*

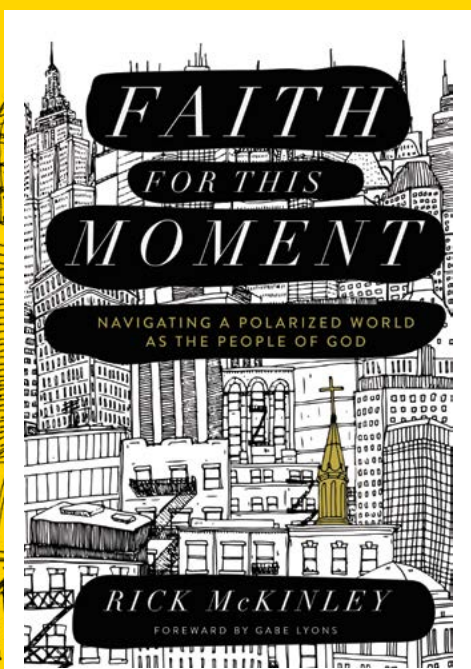
God's people throughout history often found themselves in times and places that were hostile to their faith.

They survived moments within history when they were marginalized at best and persecuted at worst. There were also times when God's people found themselves in powerful cultures, such as that of Babylon, whose wealth and power threatened to assimilate them and turn them away from faithfulness to God and toward apathy and idolatry. Their moments were known as exile, and exile is a helpful way to think about the moment we are living in as American Christians. The culture that once validated and supported biblical values no longer does, and it is pretty clear we're not going back to the "good ole days."

Exile is a purifying place; some find their way to faithfulness and others don't. The question is, will we be assimilated by the culture's values, or will we retreat from culture all together and critique and complain, or will we find the way of faithfulness? Faithfulness in exile means to practice our faith in such a way that we are transformed by the word and Spirit, blessing the culture and resisting the culture at the same time. That is what Faith for this Moment is all about.

RICK MCKINLEY

ART BY SCOTT ERICKSON





The background is a vibrant, abstract composition of bold colors including magenta, blue, yellow, and black. A stylized, high-contrast face is visible in the upper right, with closed eyes and a serene expression. The face is composed of various shades of pink, yellow, and blue, with black outlines for the eyes and mouth. The overall style is modern and artistic, with a focus on strong geometric shapes and a rich color palette.

## How to Get the Next Issue

We publish a new issue every quarter. New quarterlies will be sent automatically to monthly supporters in the US and Canada who give \$10 or more per month. One-time donors of \$100 or more get the next four issues. If you liked this issue and want to make sure you keep getting more, go to our website and sign up to become a monthly supporter if you haven't already done so.

[THEBIBLEPROJECT.COM/DONATE](http://THEBIBLEPROJECT.COM/DONATE)

SCENE FROM **WHAT IS THE BIBLE PROJECT**



## **Season 5 of The Bible Project has officially begun!**

From September through June, we will release a new video every two weeks, which means twenty videos over ten months. All the videos will continue to fill out the ongoing series we are completing. Thank you for supporting this season!