

Nehemiah and Rebuilding

Study 1 – Exile of the people of God: the back story

Welcome

In your own experience – have you ever felt yourself to be ‘in exile’?
Away from home, or from all that is familiar...

Share if you wish, personal stories, and possibly stories of others

Worship

Ground yourselves in confidence that God has good plans for his people, and good plans for our lives. You may like to sing along with a hymn, or watch a you tube video of your choice.

“All my hope on God is founded” – the words are aligned with this season of study

Pray for openness to hear God’s word, and for willingness to share each other’s journeys in this study series.

Word – Study 1 – The Back Story

1. Exile and the historic setting

The people of God have had seasons of exile, of being displaced from their homes. This series of studies begins with the people in Babylon, a long way from the city that they hold dear.

God’s people settled in Jerusalem under the leadership of the Kings, with David and Solomon starting the process (c. 1000BC). They became under pressure from the peoples around them, and the Assyrians took the northern people of Israel, the ten tribes into exile, scattering them across Assyria (740BC and following; 2 Kings 17). Later the Babylonians rose to power, and attacked those remaining in Judah and Jerusalem. These people went into exile into Babylon in three waves of deportation:

606BC – the royal courts and society leaders, including the prophet Daniel

597BC – the craftsmen and women, including the prophet Ezekiel

586BC – final deportation of those remaining; Temple destroyed, city ruined

So Jerusalem was destroyed, and the southern kingdom of Judah was defeated by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. This story is described in 2 Kings 25 and 2 Chronicles 36.

Read together: 2 Chronicles 36.11-21.

- What are the notable characteristics of the kings of Judah?
- What did God do for the people?
- How did the people respond to God’s word?
- Describe the disaster that fell upon the city and the people

2. The promises of God

God had given warnings about rejecting his love and his commandments (Exodus 20). These messages may appear quite harsh in our culture (eg. Leviticus 26.27-45).

One big topic arises about the consequences of sin and disobedience to God. Please set aside time at a later date to dig deeply. At this point perhaps touch on two occasions when Jesus was asked about suffering and sin (John 9; Luke 13.1-8).

Hope: God had given promises to the people about how to live in the hope of restoration.

Read together the prophet Jeremiah 29.1-14

- Remind yourselves of the familiar promise to the prophet Jeremiah 29.11
- Study together the setting of that promise, in verses 1-10
- and the call on the people to respond in verses 12-14
- What do you find a challenge, and what is a comfort?

3. The faithfulness of God

The historians and scripture describe three returns of God's people, following the three deportations. We shall revisit the story of Zerubbabel and Ezra in study 2.

Here is the simple history structure:

537BC – with Zerubbabel, who is mentioned in Matt 1 as part of Jesus' family line.

458BC – with Ezra, who returned to Jerusalem with priests and Levites, and whose story is written in the book of Ezra.

445BC – with Nehemiah, who returned to rebuild the city walls.

Consider the outworking of Jeremiah 29.11 for the people of God. We have so much to learn about what happened and the leaders who listened to God and who took responsibility for the people.

Think of thanksgiving prayers for God's faithfulness through it all.

Witness

We are surrounded by situations of people "in exile". Consider creatively what that might be like in different circumstances.

An obvious situation at the moment is refugees arriving in Hart District, and our church activities. Think of any responses you might like to make as a group. Plan to feedback next time on how things have gone.

Finally, consider personal responses to the call to follow God as individuals and as a local church. Is God saying anything to us?