



### Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Introduction: This session is one of several on great themes that run through the Bible. In the book 'The Drama of Scripture' the authors write this: "Imagine that the Bible, with its 66 books, written by dozens of human authors over the course of more than 1000 years, is a grand cathedral with many rooms and levels and a variety of entrances....You can, for example, enter the Bible through one of the gospels....If you want to gather a sense of the cathedral as a whole, you face an important question: where is the main entrance, the place from which you can orient yourself to the whole? The cathedral of the Bible has many themes." By looking at its themes we can begin to get a sense of how to "enter" the Bible.

### Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

How might Christians feel in exile today?



### Understanding the information (20 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

How did the experience of being in exile shape the Bible story, and how does it shape us?

The Jewish Scriptures were collected together at a time when Israel was adjusting to a huge shock. God's people had been taken off into exile (Israel in 722 BC and Judah in 586/7 BC) after warnings from prophets such as Amos and Hosea who warn of a Day of the Lord when judgment will come.



They had been driven from the land God had promised them, and the Temple had been destroyed. Lamentations describes how catastrophic this felt: "All her gateways are desolate, her priests groan, her maidens grieve, and she is in bitter anguish." (Lamentations 1:4)

The whole story of the Bible is shaped by this experience of being driven from “home”, and longing to return. Reading it with this understanding not only helps us understand the Bible, but also sheds light on how we can experience discipleship in the world as it is in important ways:

**Exile as the human story.** When the Jewish people in Babylon wrote Genesis, they would have been aware how their current exile felt like a deeper alienation - the story of exile really begins in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve being driven from their “home”. Their ‘exile’, created by sin, leads to human beings feeling far they are from home. In Genesis they attempt to address this by trying to build a city, Babel – a city with the very same name as the city to which the people of Judah were taken captive.

In the same way that our human fallen condition leads to spiritual exile, the Jewish prophets warned God’s people that their repeated patterns of disobedience and injustice were the reason exile was happening. Before the exile Jeremiah warned, “Do not trust in deceptive words and say, “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!”...if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever.” (Jeremiah 7: 4-7) The Bible reveals that our exile is not shown to be God’s desire for His people, but the consequence of our actions.

**Exile shapes how God’s people live in the world.** The way the Jewish people adapted to being in exile gives a blueprint for being disciples in the world. In exile, God’s people found themselves having to shape an identity within a culture that was opposed to the values of God’s Kingdom. Many of the Scriptures were put together in this time in order to remind them of their identity.

For example, Daniel is the story of a Jew in Babylon fifteen years before Jerusalem is destroyed, who demonstrates how God’s people live in exile – both then and now. He combines two things: he refuses to compromise His faithfulness to God, or to worship other idols in a culture which puts him under tremendous pressure to do so. At the same time, he rises to political heights in Babylon, managing to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which God has carried you into exile” as Jeremiah puts it (Jeremiah 29:7). This combination of being in “exile” in the world in terms of not being shaped by a lot of its values, and yet, knowing that God is not abandoning His world, continuing to join in with its restoration, is the balance Christians are called to live in.

Paul describes this tension when he reminds the Philippian Christians: “our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ...” (Philippians 3: 20).

While Christians may continue to feel in exile in the world, Paul is not saying that they will return to another place called heaven one day, but that they are ambassadors for the life of heaven on earth – a good earth which one day God will restore, and in which they will be fully at home in again. Christians continue to live in “exile” in the world which belongs to God. The story of the Bible shapes us in living faithfully as those who are in the world, but not of it.

**Discuss: How at home are we meant to be in the world?**

## Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Philippians 3: 20-21 which describes how Christians exist in the world.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:  
What does this passage teach me about God?  
What does this passage teach me about people?  
How does this passage call me to obey God?  
What might I do in response to this this week?



## Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of what helps you be in the world but not of it.



## Optional further material and questions

Share these thoughts or read them together:

**Exile points to the Messiah.** Right from the beginning of the Bible story there is a theme of God's solution to our "exile" coming through a promised "anointed king" which runs throughout the Old Testament and helps us understand the mission of Jesus.

A series of promises build a picture of this figure. In Genesis, God warns the snake, who has brought evil into the world, that an offspring of the woman shall come who "will crush your head (but) you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15). Later Judah is promised that a royal figure will come from his family line "...and the obedience of the nations shall be his." (Genesis 49:11)

The crucial promise is to David. God tells him, "I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.'" (2 Samuel 7: 12-16)

As the Old Testament period developed, Jewish belief began to focus on a particular person or earthly ruler – the messiah or anointed one. This ruler would be a descendant of David and would usher in an era of peace for Israel.

Famously Isaiah predicted: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever." (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Exile points to a restoration of home. Even in the Old Testament the people's longing for return home is just about the restoration of the land or Temple but about the renewal of the whole world. Chapters 60-66 of Isaiah paint a picture in which Israel shall once again be God's bride, (62:5). But when that happens that God will "create new heavens and a new earth" in which God's whole exiled creation is fully restored: "Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the Lord. (66: 17-25).

It is through this hope of return for the whole world from exile that Christians understand the coming of Jesus as Messiah, and anticipate that very same hope being fulfilled in the restoration of all things.

Discuss: What will it look like when we are finally at home in the world?

## Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



## Group prayer (5 minutes)

Awaken your might; come and save us.  
Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us,  
that we may be saved.  
How long, Lord God Almighty,  
will your anger smoulder  
against the prayers of your people?  
Return to us, God Almighty!  
Look down from heaven and see!  
Watch over this vine,  
the root your right hand has planted,  
the son you have raised up for yourself.  
Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire;  
at your rebuke your people perish.  
Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand,  
the son of man you have raised up for yourself.  
Then we will not turn away from you;  
revive us, and we will call on your name.  
Restore us, Lord God Almighty;  
make your face shine on us,  
that we may be saved.  
Amen  
From Psalm 80





## Bible Themes 8: Exile.

How did the experience of being in exile shape the Bible story, and how does it shape us?

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## Bible Themes 8: Exile

### Additional notes:

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