

Open Bible Stories - The Exile and Return

Introduction

Key Idea

The story of the exile and return teaches us what it is like to live as God's people in a foreign land that is not our final home.

Core Belief Verse

"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation." 1 Peter 2:11-12

God's Big Story

The eternal God created all things in six days.

He made a good and perfect world.

He made humans in his image to fill the earth and rule over creation.

But humans rebelled against God and ruined God's creation.

God set to restore his world through his promise.

God made a covenant with Abraham. He promised to bless all nations through Abraham.

God kept his promises across the generations.

God provided Abraham with a promised child, Isaac.

God gave Isaac a wife and she bore twins, Jacob and Esau.

God blessed Jacob and his sons, and the blessing continued to the next generation.

God rescued Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, and used him to rescue his family.

God caused his people, the Israelites, to multiply in the land of Egypt; eventually, they became slaves.

But, God raised up a deliverer, Moses, to deliver his people from their slavery.

God sent judgment on the Egyptians with harsh plagues; in the final judgment, he passed over his people who covered their doorposts with the blood of a sacrificed lamb.

Then, God delivered the Israelites by bringing them out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea on dry land.

God made a covenant with the Israelites and made them his people.

God tested Israel in a series of wilderness wanderings and eventually brought his people into the promised land of Canaan.

God raised up deliverers to lead Israel and rescue them from their enemies.

God formed Israel into a kingdom. He made a covenant with King David and promised to send a king that would rule his people forever.

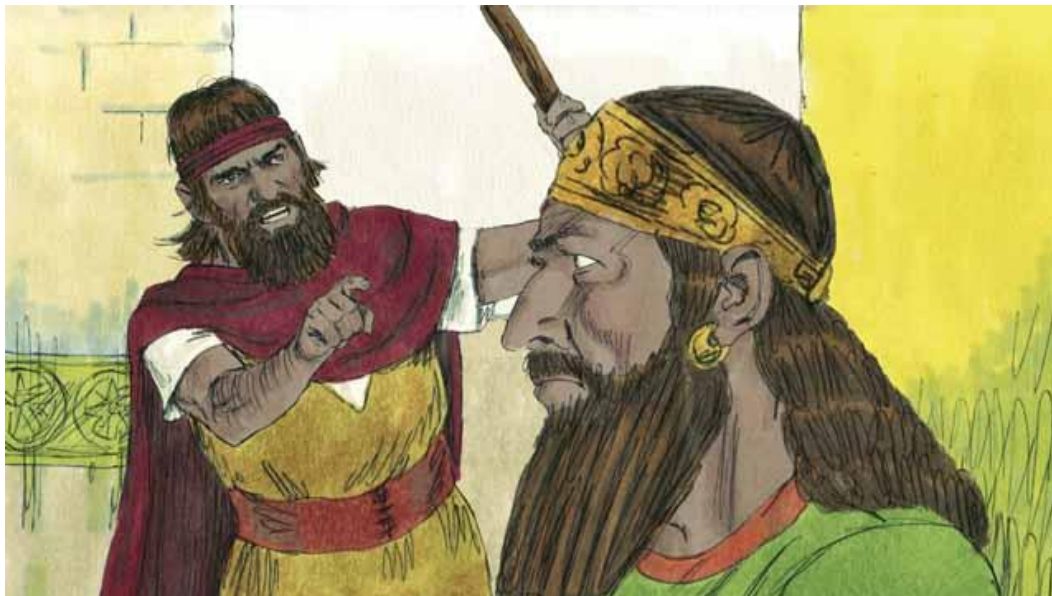
Many of Israel's kings were evil and the kingdom of Israel divided into two kingdoms.

God sent prophets to warn his people of God's judgment and call them to repent.

When Israel did not repent, God sent his people into exile. After many years, he brought them back to the land.

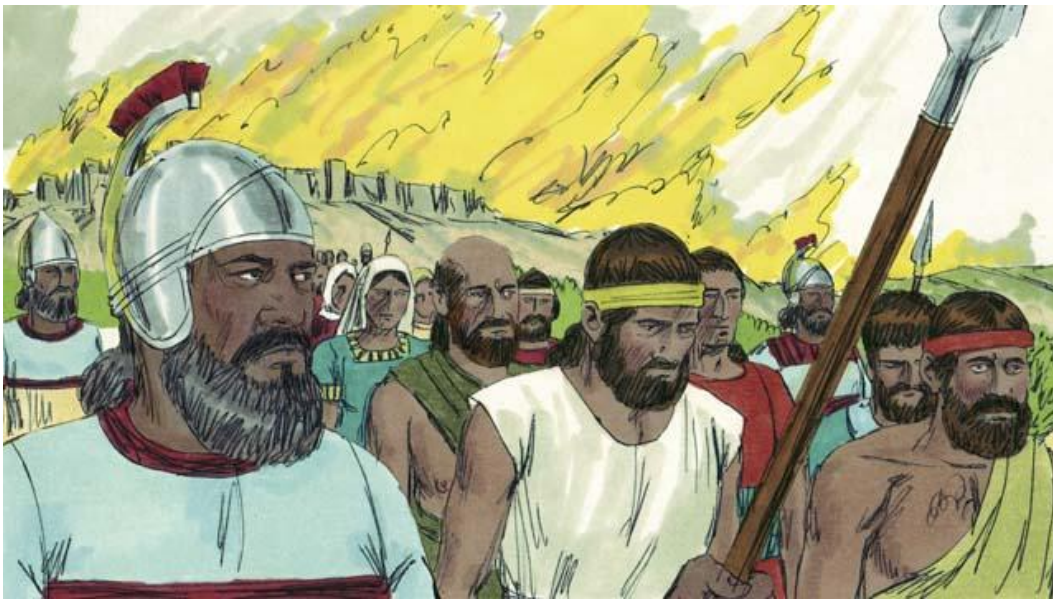
The Story: The Exile and Return

20-01



The kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah both sinned against God. They broke the covenant that God had made with them at Sinai. God sent his prophets to warn them to repent and worship him again, but they refused to obey.

20-02



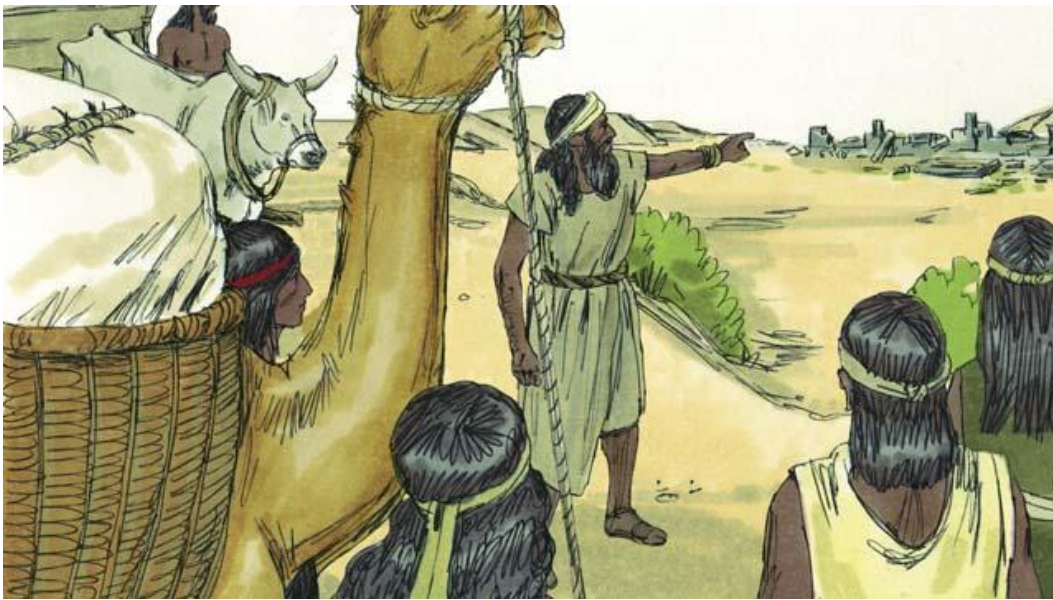
So God punished both kingdoms by allowing their enemies to destroy them. Assyria was another nation that became very powerful. The Assyrians were also very cruel to other nations. They came and destroyed the kingdom of Israel. The Assyrians killed many people in the kingdom of Israel, took away everything they wanted, and burned much of the country.

20-03



The Assyrians gathered together all the leaders, the rich people, and the people who could make valuable things. They took them to Assyria. Only some very poor Israelites remained in Israel.

20-04



Then the Assyrians brought foreigners to live in the land. The foreigners rebuilt the cities. They intermarried with the Israelites who were left there. The descendants of these people were called Samaritans.

20-05



The people in the kingdom of Judah saw how God had punished the people of the kingdom of Israel for not believing and obeying him. But they still worshiped idols, including the gods of the Canaanites. God sent prophets to warn them, but they refused to listen.

20-06



About 100 years after the Assyrians destroyed the kingdom of Israel, God sent Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonians, to attack the kingdom of Judah. Babylon was a powerful nation. The king of Judah agreed to be Nebuchadnezzar's servant and pay him a lot of money every year.

20-07



But after a few years, the king of Judah rebelled against Babylon. So, the Babylonians came back and attacked the kingdom of Judah. They captured the city of Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and took away all the treasures of the city and the Temple.

20-08



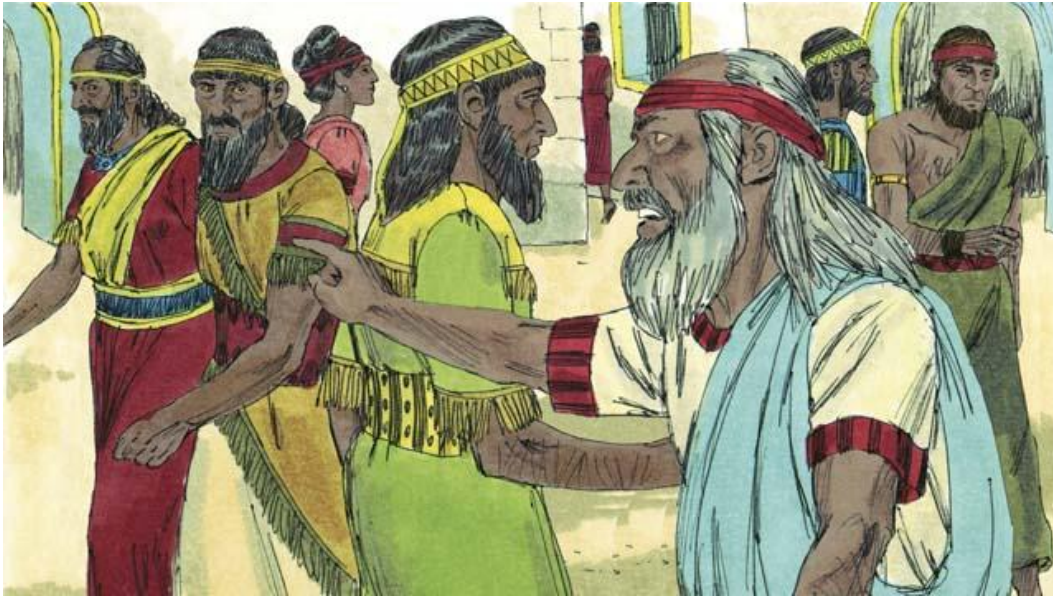
To punish the king of Judah for rebelling, Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers killed the king's sons in front of him and then made him blind. After that, they took the king away so he would die in prison in Babylon.

20-09



Nebuchadnezzar and his army took almost all of the people of the kingdom of Judah to Babylon, leaving only the poorest people behind to plant the fields. This period of time when God's people were forced to leave the Promised Land is called the Exile.

20-10



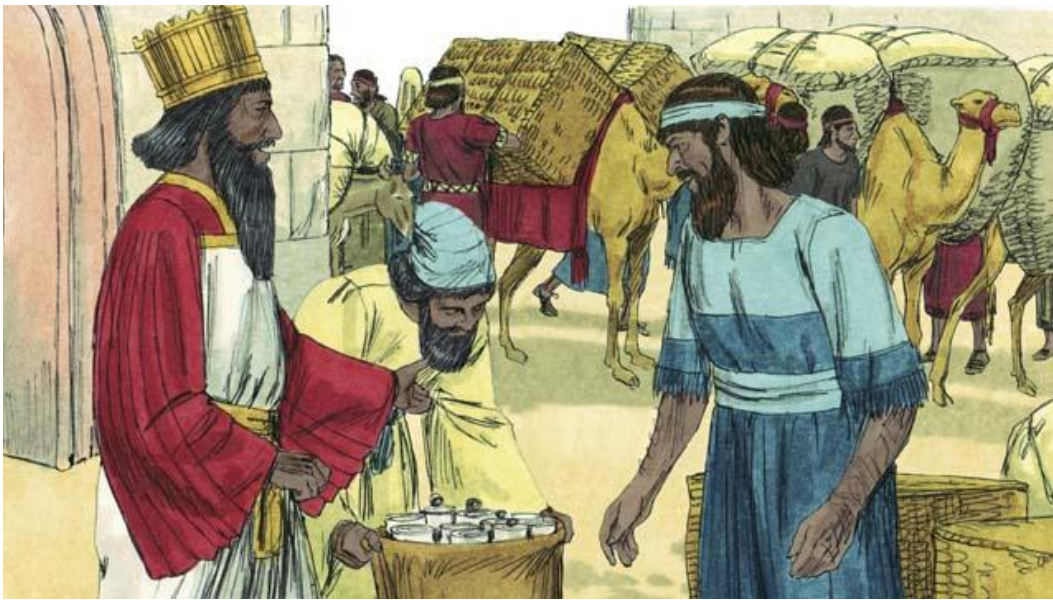
Even though God punished his people for their sin by taking them away into exile, he did not forget them or his promises. God continued to watch over his people and speak to them through his prophets. He promised that, after 70 years, they would return to the Promised Land again.

20-11



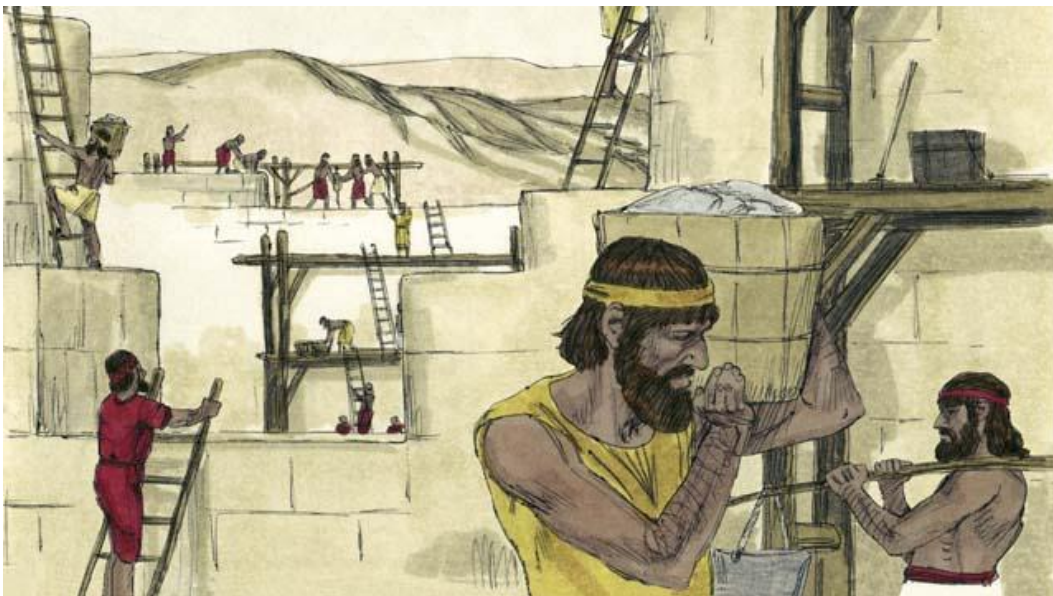
About 70 years later, Cyrus, the king of Persia, defeated Babylonia. So, instead of the Babylonian Empire, the Persian Empire now ruled over many nations. The Israelites were now called Jews. Most of them had lived their whole lives in Babylon. Only a few very old Jews even remembered the land of Judah.

20-12



The Persians were very strong, but they had mercy on the people they conquered. Shortly after Cyrus became king of the Persians, he gave an order that any Jew who wanted to return to Judah could leave Persia and go back to Judah. He even gave them money to rebuild the Temple! So, after 70 years in exile, a small group of Jews returned to the city of Jerusalem in Judah.

20-13



When the people arrived in Jerusalem, they rebuilt the Temple and the wall around the city. The Persians still ruled over them, but once again the Jews were living in the Promised Land and worshipping at the Temple.

When Tensions Arise - Understanding Causes of Conflict

- **Key Idea:** pinpointing the roots of relationship tension
- **Key Passage:** James 4:1-2
- **Main Session:** OBS 20 (The Exile and Return)

Sing a Song (3-5 minutes)

Choose a song to sing to praise God and encourage one another.

Recite the Core Belief Verse (3-5 minutes)

The verse below summarizes the teaching of the current passage. Read the verse out loud as a community. Read it again several times as a group until the whole community can recite it from memory.

Because you did not worship Yahweh your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart when you were in prosperity, therefore will you serve the enemies that Yahweh will send against you; you will serve them in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in poverty. Deuteronomy 28:47-48

OR

18 Yahweh is slow to anger and abundant in covenant faithfulness. He forgives iniquity and transgression. He will by no means clear the guilty when he brings the punishment of the ancestors' sin on their descendants, to the third and fourth generation. Numbers 13:18

Think Together (5 minutes)

Think about times when you experienced/saw conflict between different people. Answer the following questions together as a group.

1. When have you experienced/seen conflict arise among a group of people?
2. What do you think were the causes of these conflicts?

Read the Passage (5 minutes)

Conflict, tension, and disputes arise among people. To be a healthy community, we need to understand how such difficulties come about. In order to grow together as a united and one-minded community, read the passage below.

4:1 Where do quarrels and disputes among you come from? Do they not come from your desires that fight among your members? 2 You desire, and you do not have. You kill and covet, and you are not able to obtain. You fight and quarrel. James 4:1-2

Explore the Idea (10-15 minutes)

Every community can expect there to be challenges and conflict. After reading the passage above, use the following questions to help your community discuss what it means to practice Christian community in a godly way.

1. As you read this passage, what are the causes of conflict and disputes among people?
2. What different kinds of conflict can arise among people?
3. Based on this passage, how can we guard ourselves against quarrels and disputes?
4. When conflicts do arise, how can we address/resolve them to restore unity to the community?

Pray the Verse (5 minutes)

Divide the community into groups of 2-3 people. Read the verse below. Use the verse as a guide to pray that God would give your community joy, restoration, encouragement, one-mindedness, and peace.

11 Finally, brothers, rejoice! Work for restoration, be encouraged, agree with one another, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. 2 Corinthians 13:11

Movement 1: Understand the Story

Read each question aloud. Give the group time to answer before sharing the answer.

Observation Questions

20-01

Which of the two kingdoms of Israel sinned against God?

The kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah both sinned against God.

How did the kingdom of Israel and Judah sin against God?

The kingdom of Israel and Judah broke the covenant God had made with them at Sinai.

What was the warning that the prophets spoke to the people?

The prophets told them to repent and worship God again.

How did the people respond to the message from the prophets?

The people refused to obey.

20-02

How did God punish both kingdoms?

God punished both kingdoms by allowing their enemies to destroy them.

Who were the Assyrians?

The Assyrians were a powerful nation who were cruel to other nations.

What enemy destroyed the kingdom of Israel?

The Assyrians destroyed the kingdom of Israel.

How did the Assyrians attack the kingdom of Israel?

The Assyrians killed many people in the kingdom of Israel, took away everything they wanted, and burned much of the country.

20-03

What did the Assyrians do to some of the people of Israel?

The Assyrians gathered the leaders, the rich, and those who could make valuable things. They took these people to Assyria.

Who did the Assyrians leave in the land of Israel?

The Assyrians left some of the very poor Israelites in the land of Israel.

20-04

Whom did the Assyrians bring into the land of Israel?

The Assyrians brought foreigners to live in the land of Israel.

What did the foreigners do in the land of Israel?

The foreigners rebuilt the cities and intermarried with the Israelites who were left in the land.

Who were the Samaritans?

The Samaritans were the descendants of the Israelites who married the foreigners brought to the land by the Assyrians.

20-05

What did the people of Judah see happen to the people of Israel?

The people of Judah saw how God punished the kingdom of Israel for not believing or obeying God.

Did the people of the kingdom of Judah obey God when they saw how he had punished the kingdom of Israel?

No, they continued worshiping idols. They even worshiped Canaanite gods.

Whom did God send to warn the people of Judah?

God sent prophets to warn the people of Judah, but they refused to listen to the prophets.

20-06

When did God send Nebuchadnezzar to attack the kingdom of Judah?

About 100 years after the Assyrians destroyed the kingdom of Israel, God sent Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Babylonians, to attack the kingdom of Judah.

How strong was Babylon?

Babylon was a powerful nation.

Who did the king of Judah agree to serve?

He agreed to serve King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and pay him a lot of money every year.

20-07

Did the king of Judah continue to serve Nebuchadnezzar?

No. After a few years, the king of Judah rebelled abasing the king of Babylon.

How did the Babylonians respond to this rebellion?

The Babylonians came back and attacked the kingdom of Judah.

How successfully did the Babylonians defeat the kingdom of Judah?

The Babylonians captured the city of Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and took away all the treasures of the city and Temple.

20-08

When the king of Judah rebelled, what did Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers do to him?

They killed the king's sons in front of him, made him blind, and took him away to die in prison in Babylon.

20-09

What did Nebuchadnezzar and his army do with the people of the kingdom of Judah?

Nebuchadnezzar and his army took almost all of the people of Judah to Babylon. They left the poorest people in the land to plant fields.

What do we call the period of time when God's people were forced to leave the Promised Land?

This period is called the Exile.

20-10

Did God forget his promises to his people?

No. Even though God punished his people for their sin and took them into exile, God did not forget his promises to his people. God continued to watch over his people and send them prophets.

What did God promise to the people during the Exile?

God promised that after 70 years, they would return to the Promised Land again.

20-11

Who was the king who defeated the Babylonians?

Cyrus, king of the Persians, defeated the Babylonians. This happened after about 70 years.

What were the Israelites called at this time?

At this time, the Israelites were called Jews.

How well did the Jews at this time remember the land of Israel?

At this time, most of the Israelites lived their whole lives in Babylon and only a few old Jews remembered the land of Judah.

20-12

What were the Persians like?

The Persians were very strong but had mercy on the people they conquered.

What order did King Cyrus give concerning the Jews?

King Cyrus ordered that any Jew who wanted to return to Judah could go there.

How else did King Cyrus help the Israelites?

King Cyrus also gave money to the Israelites to rebuild the Temple.

Who returned to the land of Israel?

After 70 years of exile, a small group of Jews returned to the city of Jerusalem.

20-13

What did the Jews do when they arrived in Jerusalem?

They rebuilt the Temple and the wall around the city.

At this time were the Jews completely free?

No. Even though they were back in the land, the Persians still ruled over them.

Why were things okay for the Jews under Persian rule?

The Jews lived in the Promised Land and worshiped at the temple.

Movement 2: Theological Questions

What Does This Story Teach Us?

1. Why does God punish/discipline his people? Based on this story, why does God bring consequences to his people for their sin?
2. How does God punish people for sin from which they refuse to repent? How do the exiles by Assyria and Babylon teach us about how God disciplines/punishes his people for unrepentant sin?
3. How does God stay faithful to his own promises when his people are not faithful? What does the story of the exile and return teach us about God's faithfulness to his own promises?

Movement 3: Live It Out

Personal Implications & Applications From The Story

Guide the group to discuss practical obedience from this story and name concrete next steps.

1. Where can you see stubborn sin in your own life (sin from which you refuse to repent)?

2. How has God disciplined you for sin in your own life?
3. How can the story of Israel's exile and return build your faith in God's promises?
4. Think about this week. Where does "The Exile and Return" challenge you to obey God in a practical way?
5. How does this key idea shape one decision you need to make right now:
The story of the exile and return teaches us what it is like to live as God's people in a foreign land that is not our final home.

Movement 4: Retell the Story

Invite the group to retell the story several times until they can tell it clearly and faithfully.

1. Can someone retell "The Exile and Return" from beginning to end in their own words?
2. Retell this story again, but focus on what God did at each key moment.
3. Retell the story in three parts: beginning, middle, and ending. What changed in each part?
4. If you were teaching this story to your family tonight, how would you tell it simply and clearly?

Church Ministry

Reflect on how this story can edify and mature the Christian community. Design a way to minister this story to your church community.

Ministry Preparation: Take time to consider how you could minister this story to others. What setting, audience, or approach would you use? Record your ideas below.

Ministry Implementation: Minister this story to a group of believers as you had planned. Use the information in this study to help develop a teaching or lead a discussion. Record your ministry plan below.

Ministry Reflection: Think about what you learned from ministering this story to other believers. What went well? What would you do differently? Reflect on your experience below.

Movement 5: Share It

Help each person plan how they will share this story with others before the next gathering.

1. Who is one specific person you will share "The Exile and Return" with this week?
2. When and where will you share this story with them?
3. What is the one main truth from this story you want them to remember?

Report-back next meeting: Who did you share with, and what happened?

Mission Engagement

Consider how you will witness this story to unbelievers. Design a way to share this story and engage them in what it teaches about Christianity and the gospel.

Witness Preparation: Take time to consider how you will witness this narrative to unbelievers. What context, relationship, or opportunity will you use? Record your ideas below.

Witness Implementation: Share this story with an unbeliever. Use the information in this study to help develop a natural conversation or teaching. Record your plan below.

Witness Reflection: Think about what you learned from sharing this story with unbelievers. What did they respond to? What questions did they ask? Reflect on your experience below.