

WEEK 5: GOD'S PEOPLE DISPERSED

Route for this week:

1. Fall of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 52:1-30)
2. Valley of Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14)
3. Daniel in the Lion's Den (Daniel 6:1-28)
4. Getting Your Bearings: Waiting for Restoration
5. Temple Rebuilding Begins (Ezra 3:1-13)
6. Getting Your Bearings: Between the Testaments

SUMMARY

Israel and Judah neglected God and served other gods instead, violating the covenant relationship God had offered them through their ancestor Abraham and falling under the judgment that God warned them about through Moses. God withdraws his protective presence from his people, and both Jerusalem and the Temple are destroyed. The people are taken away to exile in Babylon, yet some still love and serve God. They wait in exile with hope for a day when God's people would follow him fully and can return to the land and to the life of peace and security in God's presence. After seventy years in exile, God uses Cyrus, a pagan ruler, to overthrow the Babylonians and permit the Jewish people to return to their homeland and rebuild the Temple. Many people do return to the land, but others stay in the land of their exile and begin to serve God there. They continue to await the full restoration promised when David's line would be restored through the Messiah.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians, most of the people were either slaughtered or carried away into exile. But a few remained behind in the ruined city; the prophet Jeremiah was among them. Lamentations is his poetic response to this grievous loss. Read Lamentations

3:19-33. How does Jeremiah weave the themes of grief and trust in God together?

2. Daniel was among the captives who were taken away to Babylon before Jerusalem was destroyed. He shows us what being faithful to God looks like in a hostile cultural environment. Read Daniel 1:3-21, 6:1-28, and 9:1-19. How did Daniel sustain his faith in this foreign land? What can you learn from his example for faithful living today?

3. After God allowed the people to return to the Promised Land, they immediately began rebuilding the Temple. But their work stopped quickly, when they faced opposition from hostile neighbors. Then God sent two prophets to get the people back on track—Haggai and Zechariah (see Ezra 5:1-2). Read Haggai 1:1-15. Why do you think the people responded so well to the prophet's message? Do you think they learned from their ancestors' mistakes?

4. While some of God's people returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the Temple, others remained where had been living in exile (this is called the Diaspora). Esther and Mordecai remained in Susa, and God worked through them to save his people. Take 20 minutes and read the entire story of Esther 1:1-10:3. What do you learn about God in this book that never even mentions his name?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever felt like God was "sending you into exile" as a form of judgment? Do you think God still interacts with his people this way today, or have things changed since we are in a different era in the story of how God deals with his people?
2. What can we learn from Daniel and Esther about how to live out our faith as Christians today in a culture that is increasingly secular?

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