

Biblical Theology of Exile and Exodus

The Human Story of Redemption

Introduction

- There is something about being at “home,” where we are surrounded by people we trust and there is a feeling of security and belonging
- However, some people are forced to leave home and live in a foreign land
- This is called “exile,” when we are confronted with the unknown and feel disoriented
- How did we end up here? Is there hope of going home?
- The entire Bible addresses these two important questions

Introduction

- The terms “**exile**” and “**exodus**” refer primarily to two historical events in the life of the nation of Israel—the Assyrian and Babylonian deportations
- Theologically, the concept of “**exile**” refers to a broken relationship between God and his people, while “**exodus**” refers to a promise of restoration
- Thus, Israel’s story reflects the story of humanity, a story that begins with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden and will not be resolved until the resurrection of Jesus and his second coming

Exile from the Garden of Eden

- In Gen 1-2, humanity lived in Eden with one condition from God—they must trust and follow God's one command
- They failed and were banished from the Eden—exile (Gen 3:23)
- This story is designed to set the reader up for Israel's story
- The Israelites were given the gift of the Promised Land and were allowed to live there on one condition—they have to be faithful to the terms of their covenant relationship with God
- They failed and were sent into exile

Exile Continues

- The story of exile continues in Gen 4, where Cain killed Abel and God pronounces additional curses under which he must live
- Cain responds: “Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me” (Gen 4:14)
- As a result of murder, Cain experienced a new level of alienation from God—a life entirely hidden from God’s face and became a restless wanderer
- The story of humanity’s deepening alienation from God is repeated in the accounts of Lamech (4:19-24), the universal flood (Gen 6-8), and the tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9)

Israel's First Exile and Exodus

- There is a clear parallel between the exile from Eden and the exile from Israel
- In Gen 8, humanity's exile from Eden led up to the building of the city of Babel—the same place the Israelites were sent—Babylon in what is today the city of Iraq
- In Gen 12, we see the first exodus theme played out, whereby God asked Abraham to leave and travel to the Promised Land
- That story was designed to give hope to Israel living in the later Babylon. Eventually they do get to leave

Israel's First Exile and Exodus

- The Lord had already warned Abraham in Gen 15:13 of trouble to come:
- “Then the LORD said to him, ‘Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there’” (Gen 15:13)
- Thus, Israel's time of bondage in Egypt was their “first” exile and their emancipation was the “first” exodus in a chronological sense
- Later biblical writers speak of Israel's forced captivity in Assyria and Babylon as a “return” to Egypt (Deut 28:63-68; Eze 19:4), which leads to a future regathering as a “second” exodus (Isa 11:11, 15-16; 14:1-2)

Israel's Second Exile and Exodus

- During Moses' time, he had warned Israel that if they did not turn away from idolatry, they would eventually be uprooted from the land (Deut 29:28) and scattered over all the earth (Deut 28:64)
- Israel's northern and southern kingdoms suffered a "second" exile in 722 and 586 BC, respectively
- While in Babylon, Israel's spiritual problem became clear
- Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah recognized that it was their ancestors' disregard for the law of God that led to their exile
- In response to Daniel's prayer and in accordance with the prophecy of Jeremiah, "the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation" (Ezra 1:1) that some would return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:2-4)

Israel's Second Exile and Exodus

- By the time of Nehemiah, Israel's "second" exodus seemed to have stalled
- Although the temple and the city's walls had been rebuilt and a remnant of God's people returned to the land, the regathering was small
- Upon returning home, oppressive empires were still ruling over them and people kept living in corrupt ways. The prophets said exile was not over
- How could they think they were still in exile when they were at home?
- In the OT, Israel's Babylonian exile became an image of something more universal—the feeling of alienation and longing for something more
- In the entire Bible, exile is the human condition—we are all longing for a better home

A New Exodus

- The OT held out hope that one day God would send a king to rescue the world for all the “Babylonian” captivities we’ve created
- In Jesus, he wandered about with no home, announcing the “kingdom of heaven”—the home all of humanity was looking for
- He went into exile along side us and showed us the way home
- “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ²My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going. ⁵Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:1-6)

A New Exodus

- The term “**exodus**” (ἐξοδος) is used three times in the NT:
- “They spoke about his departure (exodus), which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem” (Lu 9:31)
- “By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones” (Heb 11:22)
- “And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things” (2 Pt 1:15)

A New Exodus

- By following Jesus, Christians would discover a new way of living in a pagan society—we are **foreigners** or **wanderers**:
- “Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul” (1 Pt 2:11)
- Meanwhile, the world is not our home. We are “**strangers**” on this earth, “longing for a better country—a heavenly one” (Heb 11:13, 16a)
- Paul says, “**Our citizenship is in heaven**” (Phil 3:20)
- We remain exiles and wait for that day when Jesus would return and transform this world into a true home
- “**Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them**” (Heb 11:16b)