

**Slide 1:**

When reading the New Testament it's hard not to notice the many references and calls for God's people to live as exiles, wanderers, and sojourners. The first Christians used the term "exile" to describe themselves as foreigners and aliens living in exile from their heavenly home. In his letter, Peter addresses Gentile believers as "exiles of the Dispersion" while James addresses a Jewish believing group as "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion." Hebrews revolves around the theme of the pilgrimage of the people of God who are trekking through the wilderness on their way to their true home, the Promised Land, like the heroes of the Old Testament in Hebrews 11. As modern readers we can understand the basic symbolism these words are invoking to call Christians to live set apart from the world around them. But, without even a basic understanding of the historical exile and dispersion of the Jews during the Second Temple Judaism the analogies are flat and dull. The more a person dives into the experiences of Jews before Jesus' entry and their response to their continual subjection to greater powers the richer the parallels become.

**Slide 2: Overview of Jewish Crises**

For over 600 years, the Jews were overtaken and passed along between competing powers. In 586 BC Babylon invaded Judah, destroyed the first temple, and executed or took captive the Jews. When Cyrus the Great overtook Babylon, the Persian Empire began Jews experience some relief and were able to return to Jerusalem and begin rebuilding their temple. But, the Persian Empire collapsed in the wake of Alexander the Great's invasion in 334 BC and the Jews, along with the rest of the Persian Empire were kicked around between Alexander and subsequently his many successors who fought for control after his death. When the Seleucid Empire came out on top, Antiochus, king of the empire, put on the pressure for Hellenization and the Jews were mandated to become "good Greeks" and adopt their customs and ways of life. This lifestyle flew in the face of Judaism and their observance of the Torah and eventually the Jews responded with one of the greatest resistance movements of all time—the Maccabean Revolt, in which the Jews miraculously won the rights to peacefully worship in their temple from 160-63 BC. In 63 BC the Jews were dominated once again but this time by the Romans as they became an occupied province of the Roman Empire where they remained until the time of Jesus. During this long period, the Jews has to wrestle through theological questions about their exile and diaspora and what it looked like to live as God's people among the gentile nations.

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But Israel's story isn't the only story of exile in the history of God's people. Exile goes way back to the very beginning. Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3 is where the theme of exile got its start. God's first created people lost their home in paradise and their intimate daily walk with God because of their sin and were forced out to live as strangers in a new land. Like Adam and Eve, Abraham lived life as a stranger and a nomad, and his descendants continued the theme of living where they did not belong after fleeing to Egypt from famine. Even when Israel received their own land—the Promised Land—God warned that exile would be their punishment if they didn't keep God's commands and that is exactly why the exile and diaspora story we walked through on the previous slide came to fruition. The Jews considered life outside of Israel to be inferior to life in the land of their ancestors and began to see themselves as a people who were homeless, longing to be restored to their preexilic life. When Jesus entered the world, even He experienced life as an exile—physically as He and His

family fled to Egypt to escape Herod's murderous plan but also physically and most truly on the cross. On the cross, Jesus was exiled from the presence of the Father in His heroic act to bear the sin of Israel and the sin of every believer in order to restore God's people from their spiritual exile from the beginning. As the "New Dictionary of Biblical Theology" puts it, "...the one who for all eternity had dwelt in the bosom of the Father was thereby exiled from his presence. In the midst of that experience of exile, he cried out 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' But his exile has redemptive power. By it, his people are once and for all reconciled to God." Now, God's people, the church, live restored from their spiritual exile from God's presence yet still in physical exile from their true heavenly homeland. It is the paradox of the already-but-not-yet that helps Christians understand much of their earthly realities. As believers live in the suffering of the world while eagerly awaiting their new home, the stories and lessons handed down through Second Temple literature provides amazing insight, exhortation, and encouragement for those trying figure out how to follow New Testament commands for living as exiles and strangers. This is because the story of exile is the story of Israel, the story of Jesus, and now the continuing story of the church.

**Slide 4:** Lesson #1 Exile is a Result of Our Sin

The Jews were keenly aware that their exile was directly brought about by God as a result of their disobedience. The author of 2 Kings 17:7-9 records it like this, "All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods <sup>8</sup> and followed the practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced. <sup>9</sup> The Israelites secretly did things against the LORD their God that were not right." Israel was unfaith to the God who had remained covenantally faithful to them and their punishment was to be carried away from their homeland and their temple by pagan Gentiles. First, the Northern tribes were carried away by Assyrians in 722 BC and then the Southern Kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians in 605 BC. God fulfilled His promise of judgment on His unfaithful children just like he promised through many prophets.

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Scripture isn't the only recordings of these sentiments, the apocryphal book of "Psalms of Solomon" shows a similar lament for Jerusalem written during the time of Roman rule. In 2:8 that says, "...because the sons of Jerusalem had defiled the sanctuary of the Lord, had profaned the gifts of God with acts of lawlessness. Because of these things he said, 'Cast them far from me; I take no pleasure in them.; The beauty of her glory was despised before God; it was completely dishonored. The sons and daughters were in harsh captivity, their neck in a sea, with a mark among the nations. According to their sins he dealt with them, for he abandoned them into the hands of those who prevail.'" These psalms paint a deep grief over Israel's sin similar to what we can read in Lamentations and the psalmist holds appropriately the weight and consequences of that sin. But these aren't writings about giving up or throwing in the towel, they are mournful acknowledgements of guilt and hopeful cries for God to forgive them and restore their community. 8:27-28 says in hope, "Turn, O God, your pity upon us, and have compassion upon us. Gather together the dispersion of Israel with pity and kindness, for your faithfulness is with us." Israel should not have survived the multitude of take-overs, captivities, and massacres they endured. Like so many other ancient civilizations they should have faded out into oblivion. But

God remained faithful to Israel even when Israel was unfaithful to Him and He preserved His people

**Slide 6:**

Ephesians 2:12-13 “Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

Church, have you taken time to grieve and lament that all the horrors and hardships of living in exile have fallen on you because of your sin? Have you confessed your culpability in the brokenness and suffering of the world around you and hopefully petitioned your Savior and King to restore all things? If God was the one to send us into exile we must rely on Him alone to bring us back. Go to Him in mourning paired with deep hope as the exiled Jews modeled!

**Slide 7: Lesson #2 Faithfulness to God is Resisting Assimilation**

Being a Jew was not just an ethnic identity, it was a way of life that had to be preserved—a set of customs and laws that set Jews apart from everyone else. As Jews were forced into new cultures, they had to set boundaries of where they could conform without forsaking God’s commands and where they had to remain differentiated. Things like idolatry, diet, Sabbath, and circumcision were markers of their Jewish identity and faithfulness to God in spite of impeding culture. Avoiding ritual worship of pagan gods meant that Jews could only integrate into society so much. These boundaries set social markers that clearly set Jews apart from their gentile neighbors. Jews also had to create their own markets to ensure that their food adhered to the dietary laws set out for them—most meat in Greco-Roman society was part of a pagan sacrifice which Jews would not eat from. Observing the Sabbath set Jews apart as they gathered to worship on their holy days while others continued to conduct their businesses. Remaining faithful to their God cost Jews financial wealth and social status and often caused animosity and prejudice for them among their neighbors. For the Jews, full assimilation would have been giving up their cultural practices and identities, but most importantly turning away from the core of Israel’s belief, “Hear, oh Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.” (Deuteronomy 6:4)

**Slide 8:**

The story of Daniel gave Second Temple Jews a model to follow as they navigated maintaining a life in the various cities they were scattered throughout while remaining faithful to their God. Daniel’s story is set during the Babylonian exile as he rises to the ranks of a wise man in the royal court serving the king. Daniel clearly had to integrate into society to achieve such a high status and, similarly, the Jews could engage their surrounding cultures when it was appropriate. But, walking this line takes courage and wisdom because Daniel still had to abstain from many aspects of Babylonian culture such as diet and idolatrous prayer and this resistance wouldn’t have been subtle. In the story, we see that Daniel refuses to cease praying to His God and in the apocryphal additions to Daniel called “Bel and the Dragon” we get even more detail to see that Daniel exposed false gods in order to glorify the God of Israel. When the Babylonian god, Bel, exposed the Babylonian people are enraged, they implored the king to throw Daniel into a den of lions to be put to death. In a miraculous showing of God’s power, God closes the mouths of the lions and Daniel is saved. But Daniel’s faithfulness to God came before God’s deliverance of him

because Daniel's obedience was not dependent on if God would save him. For many Second Temple Jews, their obedience would cost them their life, but the story of Daniel showed them that they could remain faithful to their distinct identity and obedience to God and expect Him to be faithfully present with them as they faced trials.

**Slide 9:**

1 Peter 2:11-12 "Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."

1 Peter begins by addressing itself to "God's elect exiles" a phrase that begins a theme throughout the whole letter of portraying believers as sojourners and exiles in the world. Peter implores his readers to wage war against their sinful desires and live in a way that reflects their true identity and God's people who are momentarily suffering for doing what is right and holy. At the end of 1 Peter, Peter writes, "She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings." Babylon was long gone by the time Peter, he was actually writing from Rome, but by referring to Rome as Babylon Peter is channeling the exile story of his ancestors to his present day, culture fighting reality. What he is saying is that regardless of what corrupt authority has power over the fallen world believers should live in Jesus-like resistance.

Church, have you followed the example of Daniel to be in the world but not of the world? Daniel paints for us a picture of one who remains virtuous and steadfast in the face of oppression. Have you followed the imperatives of Peter to resist the ways of the Babylon of our day and live holy lives? Is corporate capitalism the idol we must resist bowing down to? Is American nationalism our false god we are looking to save us? We are not always aware of the war waging against our soul because often we have found ourselves in too comfortable of a position. If you go throughout a whole day without feeling the tension of the war for your soul, it maybe be a ominous sign that you have fallen down and worshiped today's Bel. Ask God to reveal your idolatrous heart and give you the courage to resist its worship.

**Slide 10:**

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century a Christian wrote a letter to Diognetus who was curious about how the early Christians lived. The author of the letter wrote this. "They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven." (Epistle to Diognetus 5:5-9) May the same be said of us!

**Slide 11: Lesson #3 Apocalyptic Promises Bring Hope in Suffering**

During Rome's attempt to Hellenize Jerusalem, they began to attack Jerusalem on the sabbath—a time when Jews would not fight in accordance to the Law so they were slaughtered. Rome also forbade observing the Torah and burned every copy they could find issuing the death penalty for anyone who did not comply. They commanded all mothers to resist circumcising their newborn sons and the sons were murdered if they were found to have been circumcised. The temple was

turned into a pagan cult with an altar to Zeus and a pig was offered at the front of the temple. From every angle, Jewish culture, beliefs, and dedication to the Law was attacked and persecuted. Some Jews abandoned their faith in order to preserve their life while others resisted either fleeing or facing death. During this horrific period, the Hasmonean family began to rise up in revolt. This movement of astonishing resistance had amazing and unexpected success and won Jewish independence for over 10 years. During this period of harsh oppression, apocalyptic literature, like Revelation, come out of the Jew's desperate desire for vindication and deliverance. As Jews clung to the hope of a future redemption, they were able to persevere through incredible amounts of suffering.

**Slide 12:**

Apocalyptic literature revolved around the throne room of God but also had interest with the supernatural workings outside of our spheres of awareness as well as the earthly forces of nature such as wind, rain, ice, etc. Often times, the writer of the apocalyptic vision went on an other-worldly journey where they saw how earthly realities were connected to the heavens. These writers described what they saw in vivid imagery and symbolism just like the book of Revelation in the New Testament. A heavy focus was on the swiftly coming end times when all things would be returned to a Garden of Eden-like state but first the righteous had to endure a short time of distress and trial. The idea that God's deliverance would come from suffering was prevalent and aided the Jews in their perseverance. This genre of literature reminds Christians that our present world, under the rule of Satan, will soon pass away. While we wait, we experience evil powers that fight against the church and we feel the heavy suffering those powers cause. But, we expect our Lord to return soon to destroy our enemy, reward His faithful, and restore us all to perfection and this hope is what carries us through the dimmest of times.

**Slide 13:**

2 Maccabees tell the story of a faithful mother and her seven sons who taken by the Seleucid king in the second century BC and are beaten in attempt to force them to eat swine—which is forbidden by the Torah. With the encouragement of their mother, each son refuses to defile themselves and are tortured and killed. The mother confidently declares to her sons as they die that their God “will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws.” It's recorded that the mother bore the torture and death of her sons and herself “courageously because of her hope in the Lord.” This mother's faith in the reality of a future life in God's restored and perfect kingdom is what empowered her to remain faithful in the face of martyrdom and implore her sons to remain faithful as well. She pointed her sons eyes away from their pain on earth to the heavens where their God resides. The power of hope found in a sure confidence of life after death in God's kingdom can inspire otherworldly confidence!

**Slide 14:**

Hebrews 11:13-16 “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. <sup>14</sup> People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> Instead, they were longing for a better country—a

heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”

1 Peter 5:10 “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”

Both Hebrews and 1 Peter exhibit strong eschatological theology that should result in a deep impact on how the church lives and perseveres through trials and suffering. Like Abraham in Hebrews 11, we are called to live as people are looking in hopeful anticipation of reaching our true home rather than seeking to make a comfortable home here on earth.

Church, we will face suffering in this world. We will experience loss, death, hardship, pain, hunger, war, abandonment, and more because we are exiles. This world is not our home and we are only traveling through it for a short time, our pain is only temporary. Our story is so much larger than the world we see. If we set our eyes on the promise of redemption and homecoming we can preserve through even the most desperate of circumstances. But, we must keep our eye fixed on Jesus and His quickly coming kingdom.

**Slide 15:** Lesson #4 Exile is an Opportunity to Share Jesus

Threaded throughout many writings from Second Temple Literature, and the only way that exile could be redeemed, was God’s desire to use exile for His glory and to bring in more people to worship Him. The Jews were living in closer proximity to the pagan gentiles than ever which brought out many opportunities to share and show their faith in a coming Messiah. Just like in the story of Daniel we see that Daniel’s faithfulness served to show God’s greatness as those who witnessed his deliverance from the lion’s den. Even the king declared that all the people in his kingdom must fear and revere Daniel’s God as the true God. Similarly, in the story of Tobit, a story set in the Jewish Diaspora that revolves around the trials of a pious man who suffers because of his good deeds, we see a man who represents oppressed Israel and sets a model for them on how to live in suffering among hostile cultures. Throughout the narrative of Tobit, the author’s goal is to remind Israel to have hope because God will have mercy on them, restore their land and people, and ultimately even use them for the sake of Gentiles coming to know their God. At the end of Tobit, Tobit is praying praises to God and exhorts his fellow Jews in the diaspora to bear witness to God under the watch of their non-Jewish neighbors. Tobit prays, “Acknowledge him before the nations, O children of Israel, for he has scattered you among them. He has shown you his greatness even there. Exalt him in the presence of every living being, because he is our Lord, and he is our God; he is our Father, and he is God forever.” He goes on to say, “A bright light will shine to all the ends of the earth, many nations will come to you from far away, the inhabitants of the remotest parts of the earth to your holy name, bearing gifts in their hands for the King of heaven.” The extension of God’s glory to the ends of the earth is the only thing that could redeem exile, suffering, and struggle and luckily, our God is in that business!

**Slide 16:**

Matthew 5:16 “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

1 Peter 2:12 “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

Church, you serve a God who is able to turn the vilest of circumstances into the most beautiful of stories! God is using our exile to draw those who are far off into His fold and family! Our perseverance and faithfulness to God is not only for the sake of our salvation but it is what will draw others in to see the goodness of the God we love. Are you letting your good deeds shine among your neighbors? Are you drawing others into glorifying God alongside you? This is goal of our exile story to wander and sojourn and as we go have our crowd grow in numbers until we all reach our Promised Land together!

**Slide 17:**

Acknowledging our exile as a result of our sin yet suffering with hope in a God who promises to redeem, restore, and resurrect us to our true homeland is what the Christian life is all about. God has already restored our spiritual exile and He lives among us and within us forever, but someday soon we will experience the fullness of perfected life in His physical presence. This is the good news of the gospel and what will empower us to endure as we wait with eager anticipation for Jesus’ promised return!

My hope in this very brief glimpse of the complexities of Second Temple Jewish life is that you saw how the stories and theologies that were birthed out of the Jews wrestling with how to live under oppression, among pagans, and within suffering brought about the repeated exhortations within the New Testament for Christians to live as exiles and strangers. I hope that the stories of martyrdom, perseverance, and suffering illuminated familiar New Testament commands and brought courage and strength to your present-day realities. There is so much to learn from Jews who ushered in our Savior—that exile is a result of our sin, that faithfulness looks like resisting assimilation into the world around us, that hope can be found in suffering by looking to what is promised, and that exile is an opportunity to share the truth of Jesus—and I hope you are filled with greater courage as you walk this journey homeward.

**Slide 18:**

Here are some of the of the sources I used in crafting this presentation.