

FEASTING WITH THE ORPHAN QUEEN



- THE BOOK OF ESTHER -

Bible Study Term 3 2018

40 days in Exile

To be in exile is to be expelled or removed from the place you belong. In the bible, Exile primarily refers to the event, or really the series of events, when the Kingdom of Israel—God’s kingdom—was finished. Israel was attacked and overrun by enemies. The temple, the place God dwelled with his people, was destroyed, sacked and burned. People were killed and deported. The land of God’s promise was deserted. The scattering of the northern kingdom by the Assyrian Empire happened first, in 722 BC. The conquest of Jerusalem and the southern kingdom by Babylon took place over the span of ten years, 597-587 BC.

However, the theme of exile is also significant throughout the bible. It occurs on the micro level to individuals and families and on the macro level to religious communities and nations. The book of Esther, our focus in bible studies and church services throughout the term, is a narrative looking at the people of God in exile’s aftermath. To deepen our engagement and understanding of Esther, and for the good of our own faith, we are going to spend 40 days looking at the theme of exile as it develops throughout the scriptures.

With each reading we will ask a series of questions as we read and reflect. The aim of these questions is to keep our mind and heart engaged throughout, rather than just going through the motions. The standard questions we will ask are:

✍️ **What stands out?**

- What strikes you from this passage? It might be a verse or a word. You might want to keep a journal of these things.

❓ **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

- Each passage will build our picture of the physical or spiritual state of exile. We will see people going into exile, living in exile or leaving exile. Ask how each passage builds on this picture.

🙏 **What could you pray?**

- Turn your reading into praise, thanksgiving, confession and requests.

🗣️ **Who could you encourage?**

- Is there someone else you could share part of this reading with?

The Exile foreshadowed

This first series of reading looks at stories and characters from Genesis. Each will be to establish an exilic pattern that will build towards the exile in Egypt and the exile in Babylon.

Day 1

Within the Land of Eden is a Garden. Within the Garden is a man and a woman, tasked with its care. From this garden the first exile takes place (3:23).

Read: Genesis 3:15

Notice

- The curse of exile will be overcome by the woman's offspring (3:15)

✍ **What stands out?**

? **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

🙏 **What could you pray?**

🗣️ **Who could you encourage?**

Day 2

In the Land of Eden are two brothers, keeping flocks and working the soil. From this land the second exile takes place (4:11-12).

Read: Read Genesis 4:1-26

Notice

- Sin is flourishing from generation to generation. Sacramental food laws are transgressed in the garden, jealousy leads to fratricide in the land and revenge to mass-murder (4:24) as Adam's descendants spread out upon the earth.

✍ **What stands out?**

? **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

🙏 **What could you pray?**

🗣️ **Who could you encourage?**

Day 3

Abraham leaves his country and father's household and travels to a land God promises to his descendants. Having begun to worship, we hear of a famine that leads to a time of exile in Egypt. While there is no indication that this exile is due to Abraham's sin, as will be the pattern for exiles to come. However, we see themes here that will be filled out in generations to come.

Read: Genesis 12:1-20

Notice

- The themes of land, famine, refuge in Egypt, Pharaoh's demand they leave and the plundering of the Egyptians make this story like a mini-exodus.

✍️ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣️ Who could you encourage?

Day 4

Abraham's grandson Jacob is the next to find himself exiled from the Promised Land. Having deceived his father and brother he flees far to the north, to Paddan Aram (later known as Assyria).

Read Genesis 27:1-28:5

Notice

- The exile pattern is beginning to take more shape. The story begins with God's people in God's land, yet sin leads them to be expelled to the north to live amongst worshippers of other god's (cf Genesis 31:19).

✍️ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣️ Who could you encourage?

Day 5

Today we see Jacob return from exile. On the edge of the promised land God empties him of all possessions and takes from him his ability to run away (32:25). At his lowest point, Jacob cries out for blessing (32:26) and experiences grace (32:30). Only then is his return to the promised land opened before him.

Read Genesis 32:1-33:19

Notice

- Just as the exile pattern took shape yesterday, the return from exile patten begins to take shape today.
- Notice what Jacob says to Esau in 33:10. When Esau shows Jacob undeserved kindness, Jacob says it is like 'seeing the face of God'.

✍️ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣️ Who could you encourage?

Egyptian Exile and Exodus

This next series of reading will focus on the exile of God's people in Egypt. We will focus first on Joseph and then the nation that comes from him and his brothers; the 12 tribes of Israel.

Day 6

In chapter 37 of Genesis we find God's people in the land promised to them. Yet soon the exile of one of them, Joseph, would take place. We will spend some time looking at Joseph's exile in Egypt as it provides an important counterpart to later Exilic characters like Daniel and Esther.

Read Genesis 37:1-36

Notice

- While Joseph dreams prophetic dreams, God does not appear or speak to him as was the case for generations past. He must simply rely on the promises passed down to him and chart his course accordingly.

✍️ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣️ Who could you encourage

Day 7

While in exile Joseph faces a moment of crisis involving Potiphar's wife. His anonymity, loneliness and the fact that God's people (his own brothers) had mistreated him would lead to a cocktail of justifications to turn against God. Yet he remains faithful.

Read Genesis 39:1-23

Notice

- Though Joseph is faithful, he is not yet vindicated in the eyes of people. Instead his faithfulness leads to a type of death, being buried in the dungeons, awaiting a resurrection.

✍️ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣️ Who could you encourage?

Day 8

The Lord is with Joseph, even during the darkest hour of his exile. His presence is not seen in appearances or heard in voices, but is only revealed through his providential care of the events surrounding Joseph. Slowly these begin to turn in Joseph's favour, though God's favour was with him all along.

Read Genesis 41:1-57

Notice

- Joseph is faithful and suffers because of it. He is raised up from the dungeon and vindicated. He ascends to the right hand of a great ruler from where he orchestrates the salvation of many. We will see this pattern in Daniel, Esther and Jesus.

✍️ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣️ Who could you encourage?

Day 9

A famine leads Joseph's brothers to join him in exile in Egypt where the Hebrew people prosper and grow. However, the ascension of a new Pharaoh will see a change in fortune. We will read some key chapters from the exodus narrative over the next few days as we see God free his people from their exile in Egypt.

Read Exodus 1:1-2:25

Notice:

- God's promises to Abraham are being fulfilled even here in Egyptian exile. The Hebrews are becoming exceedingly numerous.

✍️ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣️ Who could you encourage?

Day 10

The Lord's face turns back to his people. He hears their cry and begins to work for their salvation.

Read Exodus 3:1-4:17

Notice:

- Moses is not convinced he is the man for the job. This will be similar to Esther's response when a risky mission opens up before her.

✍ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣 Who could you encourage?

Day 11

Plague after plague arrive as God's judgement upon Egypt. We will consider the final plague today. As death visits houses throughout the land, delivering the horrible wages of sin, God's people are released as a lamb dies symbolically in their place. So begins their return to the Promised Land.

Read Exodus 11:1-12:42

Notice:

- Freedom is costly and requires an act of faith. A sacrifice must be made and the people must hear and trust God's call to leave.

✍ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣 Who could you encourage?

Day 12

40 years of desert wandering pass between our last reading at today's. God's people are once again on the edge of the promised land preparing to enter. We are reminded of Jacob, wrestling with God on the border of the land before entrance is permitted. Over the next 3 days, consider the life giving law that God's people must wrestle with as they again occupy the Promised Land.

Day 13

Continue to consider the life giving law that God's people must wrestle with as they again occupy the Promised Land.

Read Deuteronomy 5:1-33

✍ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣 Who could you encourage?

Day 14

Continue to consider the life giving law that God's people must wrestle with as they again occupy the Promised Land.

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-25

✍ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣 Who could you encourage?

Day 15

Having seen the law God lays out for those occupying his land, consider the consequences for both obedience and disobedience. Notice particularly the reality of a future exile should Israel forsake the Lord.

Read Deuteronomy 28:1-37

✍ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣 Who could you encourage?

Day 16

Yesterday God laid out the reality of a future exile should Israel choose unfaithfulness. Yet God is faithful even when his people are not. Should they go again into exile, God will again restore them.

Read Deuteronomy 30:1-20

✍ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🗣️ **What could you pray?**

🗣️ **Who could you encourage?**

The Babylonian Exile

The next series of reading begins with Israel in God's promised land, at the height of their power under King Solomon. For all that God has blessed them with, the Kings of Israel and the people they rule will descend into idolatry and injustice. The curse of Deuteronomy will come to bear as they are carried into exile again. We will look at the prophetic warnings that come before the exile, the moment when Jerusalem falls and what life was like for God's people in Exile.

Day 17

Yesterday we read about God's people at the edge of the promised land where Moses spoke of the reality of a future exile should they turn from God. Today we find the people of God, having returned from exile in Egypt and having conquered the land and established a monarchy, at the dedication of the first Temple. In Solomon's prayer at the dedication we see Moses' warning of a future exile is still very much remembered.

Read 1 Kings 8:22-61

🗣️ **What stands out?**

? **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

🗣️ **What could you pray?**

🗣️ **Who could you encourage?**

Day 18

We saw yesterday that the spectre of exile was very much remembered at Israel's high point under Solomon. However, it seems to have been forgotten by the kings that came after him. Generation stray further into idolatry and injustice, led by Kings who do the same. Prophets begin to bring clear warnings from God. Spend some time today hearing some or all of the warnings below.

Read Isaiah 5:1-13, Jeremiah 4:5-17, Ezekiel 4:1-5:17, Micah 1:1-16, Zephaniah 1:1-13, Habakkuk 1:1-11

🗣️ **What stands out?**

? **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

🗣️ **What could you pray?**

🗣️ **Who could you encourage?**

Day 19

The warnings brought by God's prophets, which we considered yesterday, are not heeded. God's people, already divided into north and south by civil war, are now attacked by foreign nations. Assyria conquers the Northern Kingdom (often referred to as Israel) and Babylon the Southern Kingdom (often referred to as Judah). Today we will read about this pivotal moment in the history of God's people.

Read 2 Kings 17:1-23 and 2 Kings 25:1-30 (you may also read Jeremiah 39 and 52 for the account of a prophet who lived in the midst of the fall of Jerusalem).

✍️ **What stands out?**

? **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

🙏 **What could you pray?**

🗣️ **Who could you encourage?**

Day 20

Today we will look at the depth of despair and anger experienced by God's people during the exile.

Read Lamentations 5:1-22 and Psalm 137:1-9

✍️ **What stands out?**

? **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

🙏 **What could you pray?**

🗣️ **Who could you encourage?**

Day 21

For all the heart break and anger experienced, Jeremiah has some surprising prophetic instructions for those in exile: settle in.

Read Jeremiah 29:1-23

Notice:

- Jeremiah puts a time limit on the exile. It will last for 70 years (29:10). This will become a key prophetic promise (2 Chronicles 36:21, Daniel 9:2, Ezra 1:1).

✍️ **What stands out?**

? **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

🙏 **What could you pray?**

🗣️ **Who could you encourage?**

Day 22

The book of Daniel recounts the experiences of a young man taken into the Babylonia royal court. These are stories working through over the next couple of days. As we do so, you may want to consider the similarities and difference between Daniel and the characters of Joseph and Esther.

Read Daniel 1:1-21

Notice:

- Daniel sets himself up as a type of priest in Babylon, eating only the food that would be ceremonially appropriate. He sees Babylon as his place of worship and mission.

✍ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣 Who could you encourage?

Day 23

Continue looking at the book of Daniel. Consider today what new information Daniel is coming to understand about how the exile will end.

Read Daniel 2:1-49

✍ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣 Who could you encourage?

Day 24

Continue to work through the book of Daniel.

Read Daniel 3:1-30

✍ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣 Who could you encourage?

Day 25

Continue to work through the book of Daniel.

Read Daniel 4:1-37

✍️ **What stands out?**

? **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

🙏 **What could you pray?**

🗣️ **Who could you encourage?**

The End of Exile

We will return to Daniel in a future week, but for the moment we'll turn our attention to the prophetic promises regarding the end of the Exile. In the book of Deuteronomy God promised exile for his people if they are unfaithful. But he also promised that *"the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you"* (Deuteronomy 30:3). When will this promise be kept?

Day 26

Isaiah 40 opens with a message of comfort for the exiles. Jerusalem's hard service is completed and God is coming like a mighty warrior to lead them home (Isaiah 40:3). Ezekiel sees this moment as a resurrection of the nation when God's Spirit brings their dry bones to life.

Read Isaiah 40:1-31 and Ezekiel 37:1-14

✍️ **What stands out?**

? **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

🙏 **What could you pray?**

🗣️ **Who could you encourage?**

Day 27

Isaiah continues to prophecy regarding the end of Exile. While the return will be a work of God, it will be achieved through an unlikely way. God will use a Persian King named Cyrus to free his people. Zephaniah speaks of the spiritual reality that must accompany this moment of rescue. God's people will be purified and made clean.

Read Isaiah 44:24-45:13 and Zephaniah 3:1-20

✍️ **What stands out?**

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣️ Who could you encourage?

Day 28

While Cyrus will provide the political opportunity for Israel's freedom, the spiritual opportunity is achieved by the atoning death of the 'Servant of the Lord'. In its original setting this passage depicts the death and resurrection of the nation as it endures exile and returns, yet its ultimate fulfilment will only be seen as Jesus embodies the nation and is incarnate as the True Israel. He is the Lord's Servant who will bear the sins of many. Micah also points to Jesus as the coming saviour who will bring exile to its ultimate end.

Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and Micah 5:1-5a

🔪 What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣️ Who could you encourage?

Day 29

The prophet Jeremiah had foretold that the exile would last 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-12). Isaiah had prophesied it would end with the rise of another superpower to challenge Babylon: The Medo-Persian empire under Cyrus the great. We will return today to the book of Daniel where Daniel, now in his 80's, sees Babylon overthrown by the Medo-Persian empire. Cyrus the Great then allowed the exiles to return home.

Notice

- The Chapter from Daniel begins with King Belshazzar of Babylon reigning over the kingdom and ends with Darius the Mede in charge. Daniel 5 is the night the Medo-Persian Empire takes the Babylonian Empire. Darius may be one of Cyrus the Great Commanders, or, considering Emperors would have multiple names and titles, may be a reference to Cyrus himself.

Read Daniel 5:1-31 and Ezra 1:1-11

🔪 What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣️ Who could you encourage?

The Restoration Period

The next series of readings considers life in the post exilic restoration period. While the Jewish people again occupy their home land, there is a sense that a spiritual exile continues. They long for God to return to his temple and dwell with them as was prophesied in Ezekiel. They long for the messiah in the line of David to come and lead them against their foreign rulers and was prophesied in Micah. They long for their sins to be forgiven and remembered no more as was promised in Isaiah.

Day 30

Daniel has lived through the transition between Babylon and Persia. He has seen God's promise kept. He turns his mind to Jeremiah's prophecy that the exile would last 70 years and prays accordingly that sins would be forgiven and the exiles released. However, God speaks to Daniel and we see that the geographic return from exile after 70 years is not its ultimate end. Daniel 9:²⁴ *"Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place."* Daniel comes to understand that the true end of exile is still in the future and will only come with the arrival of the 'anointed one'.

Read Daniel 9:1-27

Notice:

- Gabriel tells Daniel that the ultimate end of Exile will be in the distant future.
- There are many Christological overtones in this passage. Daniel points us to Jesus death and resurrection as the real end of exile.

✍ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🙏 What could you pray?

🗣 Who could you encourage?

Day 31

Zechariah is a prophet during this restoration period. In his words we see the yearning for God to return to his people and for a greater salvation than that which came through Cyrus.

Read Zechariah 1:1-6 and 9:9-17

Notice:

- Zechariah is prophesying during the reign of Darius one of the Persian Kings that came after Cyrus.

- There is a sense that exile continues. That God is still distant from his people and there are enemies that remain to be overthrown.
- Note again the Christological references.

✍️ **What stands out?**

? **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

🙏 **What could you pray?**

🗣️ **Who could you encourage?**

Day 32

Malachi is another prophet during this restoration period. In his words we hear a similar yearning to that of Zechariah. A distance remains between God and his people and a true purification for sins awaits.

Read Malachi 2:10-3:5

Notice:

- Again we hear words that point us to Jesus. A messenger will prepare the way of the Lord is how John the Baptist is described.

✍️ **What stands out?**

? **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

🙏 **What could you pray?**

🗣️ **Who could you encourage?**

The End of Exile

We'll now look at some familiar New Testament passages through the lens of the exile. We will find Jesus coming as 'Emanuel: God with us'. God returns to his people in the Son. Jesus comes as the true Israelite and will experience the ultimate exile at the cross, bearing the sins of the people and resurrecting God's people to live new lives.

Day 33

We will spend some time in the gospels today and over the days to come. These passages are well worn and well known, but read slowly and see references to exilic themes.

Read Luke 1:1-80

Notice

- Malachi's post exilic prophecies from Day 32 are being fulfilled.

- Gabriel, who spoke to Daniel and extended his expectation of the true length of exile has returned. Gabriel appears only here and in the book of Daniel.
- Zechariah song is replete with exilic themes like redemption, salvation from enemies, rescue and national forgiveness.

✍ **What stands out?**

? **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

🗣 **What could you pray?**

👥 **Who could you encourage?**

Day 34

Today we read the early chapters of Matthew listening out for exilic themes.

Read Matthew 1:1-2:23

Notice

- Exile is a prominent moment in the genealogy of Jesus.
- The birth of Jesus will be God's return to his people. This is the post exilic longing of the prophets.
- Jesus will save his people from their sins. While this is certainly a promise to each of us as individuals, it is first of all, in this setting, a national promise to the Jewish people who, having returned from exile, were still awaiting forgiveness.
- The Magi come from the east, from the land formally known as Babylon.
- We remember the prophet Micah who prophesied that the end of exile would come with the Messiah born in Bethlehem.
- Jesus himself goes into exile in Egypt as was true of Abraham, Joseph and the ancient Hebrews.
- Compare Matthew 2:12-15 and Jeremiah 31:15-17.

✍ **What stands out?**

? **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

🗣 **What could you pray?**

👥 **Who could you encourage?**

Day 35

Have a read of Matthew 15. What exilic themes do you find here?

Read Matthew 15:1-32

Notice:

- The parable of the lost son is especially interesting to read through the lens of exile. Remember, Jesus tells this story in response to Pharisee opposition to his welcome of sinners (15:1-3). Jesus is ending the exile of many through his welcome and offer of forgiveness. Jesus is welcoming the nation home from their exile while the Pharisees bitterly oppose it.

✍️ **What stands out?**

? **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

🙏 **What could you pray?**

🗣️ **Who could you encourage.**

Day 36

Today we see Jesus enter into the heart of Exile. He is handed over to the gentiles, experiences being forsaken by God and is buried outside the city. At this moment sin and judgement are upon him and he, as the representative Messiah, bears the sin of his people. Exile is complete in him and he is resurrected on the other side.

Read Matthew 27:11-28:20 and 2 Corinthians 5:16-6:2

✍️ **What stands out?**

? **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

🙏 **What could you pray?**

🗣️ **Who could you encourage?**

The Church in Exile

While the exile ends with Jesus, whose death allows eternal reconciliation to God, it is still drawn upon by New Testament authors as they seek to encourage churches to endure. One way of seeing the plight of the church as we await the new creation is recognising we live far from our true home. Exile becomes a paradigm through with Peter, James and John see the experiences of Christians.

Day 37

Read 1 Peter 1:1-2:3

Notice:

- Peter calls God's elect 'exiles' (or strangers in the NIV) in 1:1.

✍ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🧠 What could you pray?

🗣 Who could you encourage?

Day 38

Read 1 Peter 2:4-12

Notice:

- Again, the church is referred to as aliens and 'exiles' in 2:11.

✍ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🧠 What could you pray?

🗣 Who could you encourage?

Day 39

Read James 1:1-27

Notice

- Like Peter, James speaks to the church as those 'scattered among the nations'.

✍ What stands out?

? How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?

🧠 What could you pray?

🗣 Who could you encourage?

Day 40

John speaks of the fall of Babylon in Revelation 18-19. In the first instance he is speaking about the Roman Empire, but also of all proud and prosperous nations that turn their back on God. We end our quiet time series with the joy of the great multitude who see Babylon, the place of exile, destroyed.

Read Revelation 18:1-10 and 19:10

✍️ **What stands out?**

? **How are we led into exile/How do we live while in exile/How are we lead out of exile?**

🙏 **What could you pray?**

🗣️ **Who could you encourage?**