

Exile Part 1

The Jewish Exile: How It Made The Bible

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The Jewish Exile: How It Made The Bible

Jon: Hey, this is Jon at The Bible Project. Today we're starting a new discussion on a theme, one of the biggest themes in the Bible, in fact, and one most of us have never really thought about; The exile.

Tim: Yeah, the exile. This is the unsung theme.

Jon: In 586 BC, the Babylonian Empire came in and overthrew the nation of Israel, captured the Israelite people, and forced them to relocate and live in Babylon as exiles. This event was so severe that the problem of exile became the most important idea in the shaping of the Hebrew Bible.

Tim: The Bible doesn't come from the powerful elite that rules Jerusalem in the days of David. Their historical sources and materials go way back to those periods. But the people who shaped the Bible began to shape it into form that you and I know it. Those people are those who went through the exile to Babylon and live through generations of slavery and suffering. Even when they came back to Jerusalem, they were under oppressive military occupiers for centuries.

Jon: All that and more today on the podcast. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[00:01:22]

Jon: We're starting a new podcast series and a new video.

Tim: A new podcast series and a new theme video.

Jon: It's about the exile.

Tim: The exile of the Judeans to Babylon in 586 BC it's what all of us woke up thinking about.

Jon: The whole theme video is just about that specific exile?

Tim: No, no. It's a theme video, which means that this is an idea that runs throughout the whole story of the Bible, from cover to cover it unifies it and that Jesus provides a key turning point in how this theme develops and eliminates who he is.

The Exile. This is the unsung theme in the Bible. In terms of the popular imagination, when people think of the Bible and what Christians believe, one of the first things I think of is, oh, yeah, it is really important. They're always talking about is the exile to Babylon.

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Jon: Well, I think where the exile does come up - and this might be a good starting point before your starting point - which is, in my faith's tradition, it was acknowledged that we are sojourners and exiles.

Tim: That idea, yeah.

Jon: It really was connected to "this is not our home."

Tim: That's right. This world as you and I know it or just the physical world—

Jon: On two levels. One, this is not my home, heaven's my home. Then secondly, this world is full of so many problems, and that's not right. So we're waiting for a new reality where all these problems are fixed. To that degree, we're citizens of heaven and it makes us exiles. We didn't use the word exile.

Tim: But it is the idea that this world isn't my home. I live here but my real home is a different place.

Jon: In my tradition, that was this fuzzy idea of a different reality called heaven. But under more biblical way of thinking about it is maybe this earth is my home, but it needs to be recreated. So while awaiting that new creation, I am not at home.

Tim: That's right. You can tune it in light of our discussions and videos about heaven and earth and new creation. You could say, the world as you and I experience it isn't our true home or we don't live as if the story is finished here and now. That this world has some fundamental change to undergo to become our true home and what it was intended to be.

Jon: So it's not completely an unsung theme?

Tim: No. It's just about where and what is my true home. Is it this place transformed and redeemed and healed or is it some other world that is nonphysical or disembodied and this one gets scrapped?

Jon: But I think I'm going to be surprised at how embedded this theme is through the entire story.

Tim: It's one of these things where I didn't understand the significance of the exile, like new creation reading the Bible in my 20s.

This didn't jump out to me probably for a couple years after reading the Bible. Then, of course, a number of great classes that I took in college and then that expose me to different theologian authors who showed me this. Now it's one of those things you can't un-see. Once you see it, it's like this 3D pictures where you have to—

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Jon: I had one of those in my room growing up.

Tim: Did you?

Jon: Yeah. Those were popular in the 90s. I remember they were in the mall at that time.

Tim: In my era of growing up going to the mall, which was the 90s.

Jon: The 90s mall era.

Tim: Remember when everybody would clutter around them and you had to relax your eyes to look through it?

Jon: You just had to figure out how to look at it, and then all of a sudden, an image pops.

Tim: Then it's hard to un-see it.

Jon: Right.

Tim: Now you look at it and it's just like, "Oh, now..."

[crosstalk 00:05:59]

Jon: I had this one that was blue and white fuzz. Just shapes and just randomness. Then it was a skier skiing down a mountain. It was like the only one I could see. I had a hard time seeing them. I was so proud of myself. I hung it up in my room.

Tim: That was great. The Bible is like that. Totally, it's like that. You think you've spelunked to the deepest chamber, and then you look harder and longer and some seasons of life go by and then some things strike you and then you're like, "Oh, my gosh, how did I never see this?"

The idea of exile is like that. It pervades literally from the first book to the last book and everywhere in between. To get at it, there are two ways I think we could get at it. One is just for you and I talking. I think this was a helpful example to me - just a cool story about a guy named John Newton. He was a British clergyman who lived in around London in the 1800s. Ring any bells? John Newton?

Jon: No. Now I'm looking at your notes.

Tim: He wrote a really famous song that has been song in American public ceremonies for centuries now.

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He's the author of the hymn "Amazing Grace." Here's a story. You can totally nerd out on his story. He has a fascinating life story that involves a period of exile and slavery.

John Newton. He's born in London in 1725. His dad's a ship captain. He sails ships around the Mediterranean transporting cargo.

Jon: This is the golden age of navigation?

Tim: Yes. British Empire it's at it's tight, right? The 1700s rules the known world. That kind of thing. The economy on the Mediterranean is at the backbone of the Empire because it's shipping all the goods from Egypt and Greece, Palestine and Morocco. All that.

His dad grows up as a ship captain, and before growing up, he actually sailed the Mediterranean on six different voyages with his dad. Can you imagine that?

Jon: As a child?

Tim: Yes. Can you imagine?

Jon: No.

Tim: Sailing the Mediterranean as a boy.

Jon: That'd be great.

Tim: That'd be incredible.

Jon: Although probably not the [unintelligible 00:08:35]. People are dying of scurvy. It's not like that's awesome.

Tim: It probably wasn't. Anyway. He joins the Royal Navy when he becomes of age and after a couple years in the Royal Navy, he hates it so much. They're in port and he tries to desert the ship. He tries to run away. He gets arrested, and in front of his crew of 350 sailors, he is tied to the railing, stripped bare, and flogged with a whip 96 times, which was the standard lashing. Then he was forced to do forced labor on this ship.

The ship ended up in port. This is on the Atlantic. He ends up in port in what it is today the country of Sierra Leone. The ship captain hates him so much; he just dumps him to die at the port. He ends up getting arrested—

Jon: He hates him because he deserted?

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Tim: Yeah, yeah. It's just like, "This guy's worthless." So he just dumped him at the port, so he's got nothing and nobody.

Jon: He's in a strange land.

Tim: He gets arrested and he ends up becoming a slave in the home of...He's a white European so he's privileged in that he has that going for him.

Jon: Because there's other white European there?

Tim: There's a lot of Brits around and so no. For three years he ends up in this indentured servant position on the estate of one of the Royal Princesses, I forget her name. But he ends up essentially as a high-status slave exiled from his homeland for three years. What he oversees is slaves on the estate.

Eventually, he gets freed from that. He somehow gains his freedom. I'm highly abbreviating here. Eventually attains this freedom and he gets on a ship back to London. Of course, major storm off the coast of Ireland.

Jon: It only took him three years from like, "I got nothing, dumped on a continent to now I'm ready to go back"?

Tim: Well, three years.

Jon: That's a long time but that's pretty impressive. I mean, he could have just given up or just been a slave for this family the rest of his life.

Tim: It probably wasn't the worst gig in the world.

Jon: No. But as an indentured servant, it wouldn't be easy to just all of a sudden be like, "Okay, now I'm going to leave," and have enough money to take a ship back to London. Get it on him.

Tim: Get it on him for trying to get back home. He's an exile trying to get back home.

Jon: He was motivated. You could see the motivation to get back home there.

Tim: That's right. As the story goes, the ship off the coast of Ireland, there's a major storm and it just gets shredded. The ship is shredded. This is a famous part of his diaries because it's his conversion moment.

He starts praying and crying out to God. He's below deck and there's a big hole in the hull of the ship and there's all this water gushing in. As he tells the story, he cried out to God in prayer, "Save us, save me." Then the ship lurches because of a big

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wave, and a huge stack of cargo tips over and plugs perfectly the hole. Enough, not perfectly. But plugs it enough that it stops the water flow for the ship to drift onto the ground in beach. So the whole ships survive. He survives off the coast of Ireland. Anyway, he sees this as a sign from God.

Jon: A miracle.

Tim: Yeah, a miracle. He marks that as a significant moment, but after getting back to London, he does the only thing he knows what to do is the life on the seas. So he gets the job actually as the first mate on a slave trading ship in British West on the Atlantic slave trade. He does this for six years old.

But in his diaries, he talks about how he's deeply conflicted about this because he knows that God saved him. At least that's what he believes, he's beginning to read his Bible and so on, but he's engaging in the kidnapping, purchasing and transporting of slaves in horrific conditions on these ships. He does it for six years until he suffers a stroke, which he sees as another sign of judgment from God.

Jon: How old is he at this point? He's born in 1725, and I think that was 1754 when that happened. He's 29.

Jon: He got a stroke in his 20s?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Living hard.

Tim: Talk about a hard life. He's not even 30.

Jon: He's not even 30 and he's had more life experience than most people.

Tim: Now, I'm really truncating. He gets married. But in the late 50s, so he's in his early 30s, he renounces the slave trade. He's very familiar with it, he thinks it's horrible. So he fully converts whole life conversion to Jesus and he goes to seminary.

In 1755, his new job was being appointed as a tax collector in the port of Liverpool and in his spare time he studied Greek and Hebrew, was ordained as a priest in the Church of England. He became a local church pastor.

Jon: What's the Church of England?

Tim: The Anglican Church.

Jon: Okay.

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Tim: He becomes a pastor. Here we get into the story of how he meets William Wilberforce and he's a part of founding this incredibly influential group of networked Christian businessmen and politicians. He becomes a part of the abolition movement led by William Wilberforce. He was actually one of the key Wilberforce's mentors and key inspirations. Newton lived to see the passage of the Slave Trade Act 1807, which is crucial in the abolition of slavery.

Anyway, he went on to live this really incredible life, but his own calling was just to a local parish serving the poor and preaching sermons in the name of Jesus. Here's what's remarkable. I knew about Amazing Grace like most Americans - like this song. I remember when I was first told about his story and that it was this super hard life of just his own horrible choices that led to a long period of exile from his homeland, and then dangerous life-threatening return, and then what he gave his life to after that experience of exile.

Then I remember going back and looking at the lyrics of the song. It completely changes their meaning to think of this man writing these words when.

Jon: What part of his life did you write?

Tim: Yes, I did write that down. He wrote it in "I was in these years in ministry." He wrote a number. Actually, he's a credible brain. He wrote a lot of different poems and hymns. 1779 was when he published a volume of hymns and Amazing Grace was in that collection. So he's now 54 in 1779.

Jon: Do you think he just love to...was there a lot of singing on sailboats, do you think?

Tim: That's a great question. I have no idea.

Jon: Like sailing teams.

Tim: My boys are in a pirate phase. Hardy har is how they greet me in the morning. Hardy har, dad. Hardy har, har, where be the treasure? And they sing pirates on. I have no idea.

Jon: It must be.

Tim: It must be. I just want to read the words of the poem. Think about a man who's been shipwrecked, whose been exiled and functioned as a slave, functioned as a taskmaster of slaves, a transporter of slaves, heart attack, or a stroke. Just a gnarly life on the seas.

Jon: Greedy sailor.

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Tim:

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,

That saved a wretch; like me!

I once was lost, but now am found,

Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,

And grace my fears relieved;

How precious did that grace appear

The hour I first believed!

Remember the moment he identified as the beginning of his conversion was in the belly of the ship watching a piece of cargo tip over and plug a hole of a sinking ship. That's so gnarly.

Jon: That's the hour he first believed.

Tim: Through many dangers, toils, and snares,

I have already come,

'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far,

And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,

His word my hope secures;

He will my shield and portion be

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As long as life endures.

When this flesh and heart shall fail,

And mortal life shall cease;

I shall possess within the veil,

A life of joy and peace.

Maybe I'm just nerding out. I don't know what I'm sharing. For me, this was a deeply meaningful experience. After I learned about his story, this song just became so profound to me. It's one of those things where you think you know something, and then you realize the life experience that shaped a human that could write a poem like that, and then you'll never read the poem the same way.

There's something about his experience of exile and slavery and physical hardship that makes you sympathetic to these words in a way. Like if you never knew his story, and all you know about the song is like you grew up with strict religious grandparents and you go to church with them twice a year, and they forced you to sing the song. But then, all of a sudden, the same poem can feel like oppressive religiosity and all that kind of thing. But once you realize that it comes from someone who suffered in exile, you're sympathetic to it and there's an openness to it.

I think it's just the same principle when somebody who has suffered deeply starts talking people usually are quite and start listening.

[00:20:32]

Tim: Here's why I think this is a helpful example is that the Bible as inform the literary shape that you and I know it is the product of a people group that underwent centuries of slavery and exile. The Bible is - we've used this phrase before - a minority report.

The Bible doesn't come from the powerful elite that ruled Jerusalem and the days of David. They are historical sources and materials that go way back to those periods. But the people who shaped the Bible began to shape it into the form that you and I know it. Those people are those who went through the exile to Babylon and lives through generations of slavery and suffering. Even when they came back to

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Jerusalem, they were under oppressive military occupiers for centuries up to Jesus' own day.

The Jesus movement for the first centuries, all the New Testament documents come from the period when the Jesus movement was a persecuted religious minority. The Bible speaks to us from the same type of posture as John Newton.

Jon: Yeah, of just this rough life. But for the biblical authors, it's generations of pretty rough.

Tim: Not just one lifetime; generations.

Jon: It's good to think about that. It's good to think about how gnarly it would be to be taken from your home. I mean it's gnarly that John Newton was abandoned, but part of me is kind of like—

Tim: He deserved it.

Jon: No. Well, he's a kid that grew up on the sea and he doesn't have a family. It's almost this cool adventure story even though it was rough. But imagine you're just living in your community and some Empire comes in.

Tim: Invading army comes.

Jon: Invading army with just military power you can't deal with and they just take over and they ship you all out to some foreign land.

Tim: Imagine just that scene of marching in file.

Jon: Yeah. With your family, extended family, people you have no idea, just the fear—

Tim: Filling stuff into the bag on your back or on your pack donkey and you're walking away, never to return.

Jon: And I'm sure people are dying and people are being abused. Because you're not treated as the same level of human by another civilization. Then you find a way in this new world for generations. And that's the setting where this biblical narrative is shaped.

Tim: That was one key event that happened in 586 BC to Jerusalem because that event happened to the Babylonians in the Babylonian exile. That event happened to the people who carried with them the stories and poems and the materials from earlier on Israel's history. But the people who took all that into exile and begin to shape it into the texts that we know as the books of the Old Testament, that experience of

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exile as God used them, and inspired them to shape the Bible, that experience of exile left its mark on how they told the whole story, how they framed their whole history.

Now all of a sudden, just like John Newton, when he thinks of trying to tell his life story or write a poem, his whole life gets told through the lens of those few key events of the shipwreck and the exile. So it's very similar that these events that happened late in Israel's history shaped how they retold their entire history going all the way back to the beginning and then going all the way forward so that when Jesus lives half millennia after these events, he's still is using imagery and language connected to exile and we're still living in exile and we're still waiting for the true homecoming even though they're back in the land.

So this event completely has left its mark. It's again, like the 3D drawing. Once you see it, you see, like, "Oh, my gosh." The Bible is the Bible for exiles. It's produced by people who were in exile and it's produced by a whole culture that was shaped by that experience even after they returned to the land. That's exactly what the Bible is. It's totally what it is.

Jon: It's an assemblage of literature by people going into exile. But not only that, it's the literature that they have which came from a minority position within Israel.

Tim: That's right.

[00:26:22]

Tim: I guess I'm still assuming that everybody just knows when the exile happened in relationship to all the others. We should recap.

Jon: Let's set the stage.

Tim: We got Abraham.

Jon: Abraham came from?

Tim: His family came from the region of ancient Babylon.

Jon: Which would have been in the Mesopotamian?

Tim: Yeah. Where the Tigris and Euphrates...Basically by the Persian Gulf in modern day Iraq.

Jon: So he's just a dude who he gets some religious experience from...He hears from God
—

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Tim: His family emigrated from the region of Babylon all the way up into ancient Haran.

Jon: That was after he had God experience?

Tim: No.

Jon: It was before?

Tim: That's his dad.

Jon: Oh, his dad moves up there?

Tim: Yes, his dad moves up there.

Jon: That's where he's living?

Tim: In the narrative, that's where his family is.

Jon: That's where he grows up then?

Tim: That's where he is. He's already born.

Jon: We don't know where he grew up?

Tim: There are no details given. There's like two sentences. His family is from Mesopotamia, Babylon. His family immigrates up to Haran. Even there they're sojourners and immigrants - in Haran. Then it's from Haran that he journeys.

Jon: And is probably just a small village on the Euphrates? I mean, what do we know about Haran?

Tim: It's an ancient city.

Jon: Not a village; it's a city. Ancient city on the Euphrates?

Tim: Yeah. On a river that flows into the Euphrates. So it was Abraham. Israel's origin comes from a wandering Bible family. They emigrated multiple times. That's important. Even though that's not technically exile, he wasn't forcibly removed there, the whole of their story is of a people who don't have a true home from the very beginning.

Abraham goes into the land of Israel, Palestine, he wanders. He buys some land, but he wanders. His family ends up actually emigrating down to Egypt and then the famous story of Pharaoh - they become enslaved. Moses.

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Jon: Abraham's family?

Tim: Abraham's family is four generations after him.

Jon: You're skipping?

Tim: I'm skipping forward now. I'm trying to get the big picture. We're just trying to get a framework for the exile.

Jon: Yeah, yeah. Sorry I might be going too slow. But Abraham in Haran gets called by God to go where?

Doesn't he get called to go somewhere else?

Tim: To go to the land of Canaan.

Jon: To the land of Canaan?

Tim: Yeah, that's right. We'll get here.

Jon: I just thought we skipped to Joseph.

Tim: I'm just doing the big picture story real quick.

Jon: Real big quick.

Tim: Real big picture because then we'll dive in and walk through the story a little more slowly. Then we have the Exodus, Moses, they come out of Egypt into the promised land. Joshua, period of judges, man, we don't have a king, tribes duking it out.

Finally, they get a king. Saul doesn't work out, and then David. Hooray. Solomon, he puts Israel on the map on the international scene. Then after him, the tribes split. There's a near civil war and they split into two rival kingdoms. There's a bunch of tribes up in the north.

It's confusing, because often in the story - this is now in the books of 1 Kings and 2 Kings - the northern tribes are often called Israel. Then the southern tribes based in Jerusalem are the Judeans through the tribe of Judah. The word Israel can refer to all of those together, or sometimes just the guys in the north. That's confusing.

The guys in the north their kingdom last 200 years after Solomon until one of the first ancient Mesopotamian world empires comes - the Assyrians - and then they attack besiege Samaria, take it out.

Jon: When you say Samaria—

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Tim: Samaria was the capital city of the northern kingdom.

Jon: But they don't take out Jerusalem?

Tim: They don't. They try, but they don't succeed.

Jon: City on a hill.

Tim: So the northern tribes and the northern kingdom is just destroyed and it's the first exile of any Israelites in 722 BC. All those...Well, many. We don't know how many, but it seems like a lot where most of those Israelites were just straight up captive, deported to all these other cities in the Assyrian Empire.

Then the Assyrians policy was to relocate other people groups and resettle them. Just like mix everybody up. Then the Assyrian Empire Falls about 100 years after that in 612 BC to the rising new power Babylon. Then it's Babylon who comes knocking on Jerusalem's door. Three different times, Babylon came to captive and number of Judah and Jerusalem, Israelites living in Jerusalem and took them in waves of exile to Babylon.

This is where Ezekiel is taken in the second wave and so is Daniel. They started out by just taking all the executive staff team, all the high-level leaders, important people and then installing around puppet leaders.

Then those puppet leaders rebelled and so in 586 BC they just took out the city, destroyed it, burned the temple, took tens of thousands of people in chains away and relocated them to places like whereas Ezekiel is sitting in Ezekiel chapter 1 by irrigation canal in a refugee camp. Somewhere in the delta of the Tigris and Euphrates with these massive, massive agricultural fields. They would relocate slave populations and just live in tents by the canals to work the fields. That's where Ezekiel is on Page 1 of the book of Ezekiel.

Jon: So these exiled communities, Jewish exiles who are now basically...are they slaves then? How are they treated?

Tim: Actually, we have very little information. Ezekiel, he gives us one window into people living in refugee camps alongside irrigation canals. Daniel gives us a portrait. Some of the elites who were really high potential they were recruited into the Babylonian government and they dressed, talked, learned the language, dressed like Babylonians kind of thing.

There was a whole trove of texts found. It was like name lists. I should know more about these. They're called the Murashu documents. But it's all these lists of names

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like city and town named lists from ancient Babylonian time. Cities and villages from this time period.

Scholars, they're reading these and it's all these Babylonian names and then they start coming across all these names that look like Hebrew names among the Babylonian names. They can begin to paint a portrait of after a couple generations, many Jews, and Israelites had just woven themselves into the fabric of day to day life.

Not unlike refugee families, maybe that comes to different countries. The first generation is just totally traumatic., but their kids become what are called third culture kids. Both have a sense of home with their family and their former life, but now they have a new home, which means they have no home. Third culture.

Jon: Interesting.

Tim: So we don't know.

Jon: There's something really unique about the Jewish culture where the identity sticks. It seems like a lot of immigrant populations assimilate pretty quickly into a new culture. But they are in Babylon in different places for a couple hundred years?

Tim: Well, they're there. That happens in 586 is when the last wave and the destruction of Jerusalem. But 50 years later, the Babylonian Empire crumbles - it didn't even make it a century - and the Persian Empire rises to the scene. So they're from further east, the Persians. Then they take over.

Jon: So now Persians—

Tim: Now the Persians are over the world Empire. They inherited from Babylon.

Jon: Who's in Jerusalem at this point?

Tim: All kinds of people. There's a lot of Judeans who were still in the land. They didn't get taken into exile.

Jon: They can round up everyone.

Tim: There are lots of people still there who are Judeans, there are some stragglers from the former northern kingdom that are there and then there's just all the northern part. So 50 years later when the first waves of Judeans start coming back to Jerusalem, that's what the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are all about in the Old Testament.

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Jon: Because the Persians let them come back.

Tim: The Persians gave him permission to go back. The Persians watched Assyria Babylon blow the world Empire.

Jon: They saw two rounds of world Empire building. They learned a thing or two?

Tim: They learned the iron fist and trying to erase people groups wasn't the way to go. They had this policy of actually letting all these groups exiled by the Babylonians go back home and rebuild their own identity, but under Persian governors and under the Persian tax system, of course.

So yeah, the Persian government sponsored a whole bunch of groups returning, and the Judeans were one of them. Zerubbabel, Ezra, then later Nehemiah, over the course of a century, all these waves of doodads go back. But not everyone went back. Lots of people stayed behind because they built their lives there.

Jon: Even after 50 years, you're like, "Well, this is our new home."

Tim: That's right. I mean, just think. Your psychology, your way of seeing the world after undergoing an experience like it's very different from somebody who just grew up and has lived their whole life in one town. Your sense of stability in the world is very...

I had a number of friends in college, who their families had emigrated from different parts of the world. I had a friend whose family immigrated during the revolution in the country. Their way of seeing the world and their way of thinking about stability and money, all of it shaped by that experience. It's traumatic to relocate as a child. These experiences have a deep psychological impact on people. Again, that's the culture. The biblical authors, that's their story.

[00:38:12]

Jon: Was it then coming back during the Persian Empire that's when likely the Old Testament was shaped?

Tim: Yeah. Again, the materials in the Old Test...like a quilt. The pieces of a quilt go way back. But the framers of the quilt—

Jon: People pulled it all together in its final shape.

Tim: Begin to arrange it. Ezra comes back to the land and he's got this thing called the Torah of Moses that he is teaching to people and that they're reading aloud. This kind of a public reading of Scripture conversation. There's some earlier form of the

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Scriptures. Then all the prophets who warned the Babylonians was coming to town and nobody listened to them, now people are listening.

Jon: Yeah, we're reading those now.

Tim: The words and writings of the prophets that everybody ignored before the Babylonian, all of a sudden these words are vindicated as—

Jon: And you've got these writings from what's happened with Daniel and his crew?

Tim: Yeah, Daniel and his crew, you've got all kinds of poems and ancient worship songs that were sung in the temple before the exile. Those get along with all this new poetry being produced by the community back in Jerusalem. They're shaping the Hebrew Bible and that's a process that will take place over the next 200 years up until the very final texts and books in the Hebrew Bible.

Jon: This is during the time then when they're coming back from exile. Not everyone. They're rebuilding the city of Jerusalem; they're rebuilding the temple.

Tim: Rebuilding the temple. They're rebuilding their identity.

Jon: Now they're trying to explain, "Who are we, why do we have a temple, why do we have the city?"

Tim: Why are we rebuilding it? What happened to the first one?

Jon: And why did we get hauled off?

Tim: Why did the exile happen?

Jon: All these questions are trying to be solidified and answered.

Tim: "And what hope is there for the future because we are the inheritors of these ancient covenant promises—"

Jon: Of the God of the universe, the one true God—

Tim: Who wants to bring blessing to all of the nations through us. And that is just not really been happening.

Jon: And the best era we had was under King David and his son.

Tim: Solomon. That was the golden era.

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Jon: "That was the golden age and it seems like we need a king like that again. So when's that going to happen?"

Tim: "When's a new David going to come and restore our land, free us from the foreign oppressors."

Jon: Because they're still under occupation?

Tim: They're under the Persians, and the Persians lasted a couple of centuries till Alexander the Great. Then Alexander the Great comes.

Jon: The fourth world builder.

Tim: Then he builds this thing that lives on in fractured, fragmented form for a couple centuries until the Romans in the mid-first century BC.

Jon: It's the fifth.

Tim: Yeah, the fifth world Empire. So sequence and a lot of little mini things in between. Sequence of five mega world empires spanning from 700 BC, all the way up to the time of Jesus. That's 700 years right there in the Roman Empire last up until the 400 after Constantine.

Jon: They really got it right.

Tim: Yeah, the Romans lasted the longest.

Jon: They saw four other world empires, and they're like, "Okay, we can make this happen."

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Thank you for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. We're a nonprofit crowdfunded studio in Portland, Oregon. We believe the Bible is one unified story that leads to Jesus and we make lots of free resources to that end. They're on our website at thebibleproject.com, and you can also view them all on our YouTube channel, youtube.com/thebibleproject.

If the Bible's new to you, we've got a great series called "How to Read the Bible." So check that one out. Thanks for being a part of this with us.