

REBUILT

EZRA + NEHEMIAH

SEASON 1+2



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why this series is important

Deconstruction - a process of reexamining and questioning one's beliefs and values.

There has been a large exodus from Christianity in the West over the last 20 years. Churches, pastors, and leaders have hypothesized about why, but it hasn't changed the reality that the influence of Christ, and by extension, His church, in society has diminished.

Sometimes those leaving have done so with bitterness and anger, but more often with a quiet, aching sense that the faith they developed is no longer holding up. It seems like everywhere you turn, someone is deconstructing their faith, and that's made us in the church...anxious.

A lot of people are afraid to even talk about it, either because acknowledging it makes it more real or **because their faith** isn't holding up anymore, and they are afraid of what exploring it might lead to.

But here's something we've learned: ignoring the cracks in a person's faith doesn't make them go away. If anything, it keeps us from doing the one thing God has always invited His people to do: face what's broken and begin the work of rebuilding.

That's why the story of **Ezra and Nehemiah** is so relevant right now.

The story was written in a time when God's people were living in the aftermath of devastation. Their temple had been destroyed, their city walls torn down, and their identity stripped away.

In some ways, it mirrors the experiences of churches and Christians today. Trust in religious institutions has crumbled. Leaders have failed. Some believers have walked away, while others stand in the rubble, unsure of what to do next.

But there's hope. Ezra and Nehemiah show us what happens when God meets His people in the ruins. It's a reminder that deconstruction isn't the end of the story; it's just the beginning of a new chapter in a book with a lot of chapters.

Throughout history, whenever faith has become overly institutionalized or distorted by power, God has found ways to restore his Word to his people, forcing them to reckon with what had been built in His name and whether it still reflected His heart.

In Jesus' day, the truth was guarded by the religious authorities. In the 15th century, it was kept in Latin and controlled by the Church's hierarchy. But in both cases, God intervened so that **His voice could be heard again by everyday people**. These moments weren't just theological upgrades; they were reformations focused on rebuilding and renewal.

And now, I believe it's happening again.

People no longer seem content to let pastors and institutions do their thinking for them. With online forums, podcasts, and open-access theological resources, an increasing number of believers, skeptics and deniers are asking tough questions that require genuine answers. Conversations about God's Word have made their way out of locked rooms and into living rooms, coffee shops, group chats, discussion threads and video reels.

And yes, it's been messy.

Deconstruction is always messy. I've never seen a home renovation that didn't start with a lot of dust, a pile of broken materials, and a huge mess. But we're not supposed to walk away from the ruins; **we're supposed to start picking up the pieces.**

This series is an invitation to that.

We may face some uncomfortable truths about what is broken in us and in the church. We might need to admit that not everything we've tried has been good, even when it came from a good heart. But we're also going to see the grace of a God who rebuilds—slowly, faithfully, and completely.

You probably know someone who's deconstructing their faith—maybe that someone is you. Wherever you are in your life's journey, this series isn't about perfect answers or reestablishing an institution. It's about finding the Grace of Jesus in the rubble and rebuilding your faith, or someone else's, on a firm foundation.

So here's my challenge: don't be intimidated by the task ahead, because you were never supposed to do it alone anyways.

Let's do it the way God's people always have.

Let's rebuild, together.

SEASON 1 + 2

series overview

september 2025 – june 2026

We know. Ten months is a long time.

In a world where most things are fast and bingeable, it might feel strange to stay in one series for almost a whole year. But this isn't just a series, it's a journey. We're slowing down on purpose so we don't miss what God is showing us.

To keep things fresh and allow us to key in on all the themes available to us in Ezra and Nehemiah, we've broken down our series into six **"Seasons."** Think of it almost like a TV Series. One overall theme with six sub-plots, each with its own focus, flavour and heartbeat. These seasons will help us trace the shape of the story and pay close attention to the different aspects of spiritual rebuilding. They also give us space to pause, reflect and re-engage along the way.



let's break it down

Season 1: Return & Restore Worship - Sep. 2025

God calls His people back from exile—not just to reclaim land but to rebuild worship. This season helps us reflect on how spiritual renewal begins with returning to God's presence and recovering what we've lost.

Season 2: Opposition & Perseverance - Oct. 2025

Every holy mission faces resistance, but God strengthens those who keep building through the pressure. In this season, we'll learn how to persevere in faith when life pushes back hard.

Season 3: Dealing with the Past - Jan. 2026

God sends leaders steeped in Scripture to lead a generation out of broken cycles. This season invites us to bring our history to the light and walk forward with truth, grace, and healing.

Season 4: Fortifying Faith - Feb. 2026

Rebuilding isn't just about what's broken—it's about what's next. In this season, Nehemiah's courage and conviction call us to develop a faith strong enough to hold under pressure.

Season 5: The Role of the Church - Apr. 2026

God's justice starts within His people, not outside them. This season challenges us to be a church marked by equity, compassion, and courageous accountability.

Season 6: Renewal for the Journey - May 2026

Revival doesn't end with a celebration—it moves into a life of sustainable faithfulness. In this final season, we explore what it means to live as a rebuilt people with enduring joy, purpose, and hope.

how to use this workbook

This book is intended to be a resource as you journey through our **Rebuild Series**. Its two goals are:

- to provide more content and information about part of the story that we might not be able to focus on during Sunday Sermons or our Podcast, and
- to provide you with a space to reflect and take notes throughout the series.

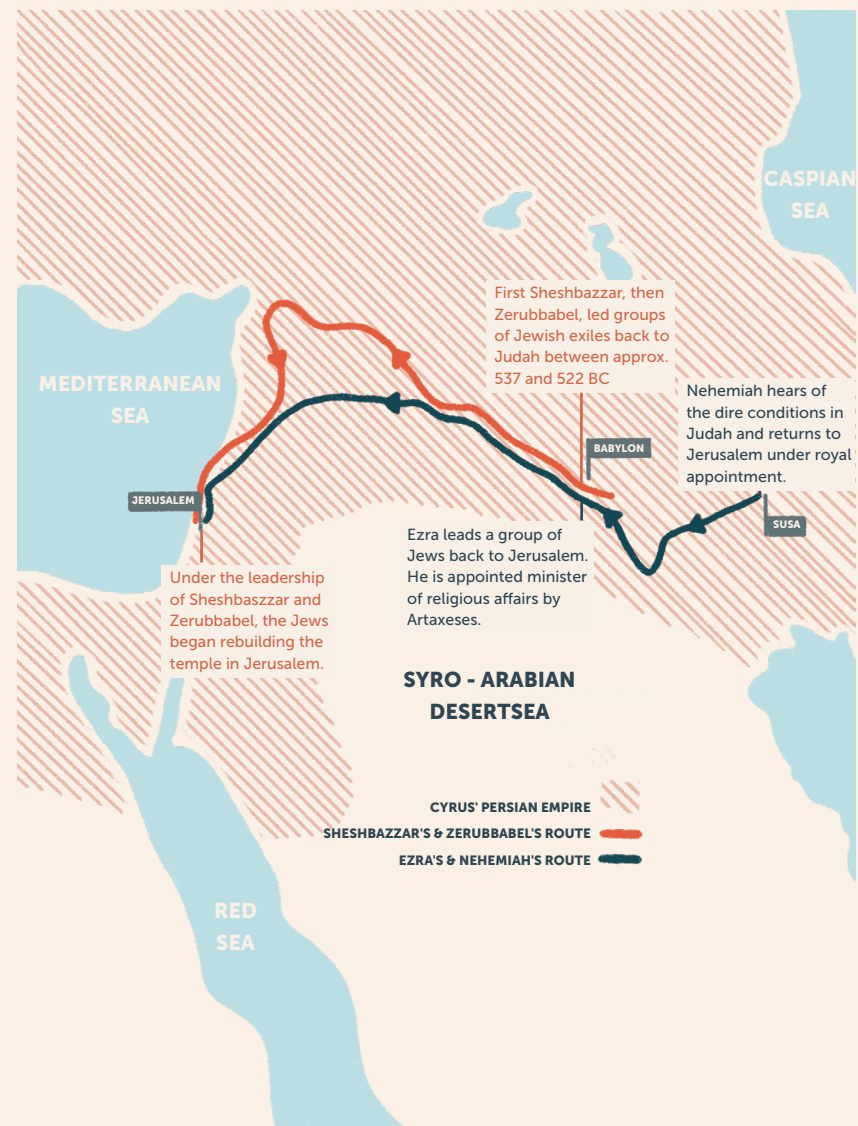
The first few pages of this book provide general background information on the Israelites' journey during their exile, as well as some context on the main characters of our story.

The rest of the book goes week by week through our series, delving deep into topics that we might not have time to explore on a Sunday morning or mention on the Podcast. We encourage you to take notes throughout the series and see what connections you can make in your life today.

For a digital copy of this workbook and other resources, visit hopeinnerkip.ca/rebuild



return to Jerusalem



Israel, the Kingdoms, and the Exile

A United Israel

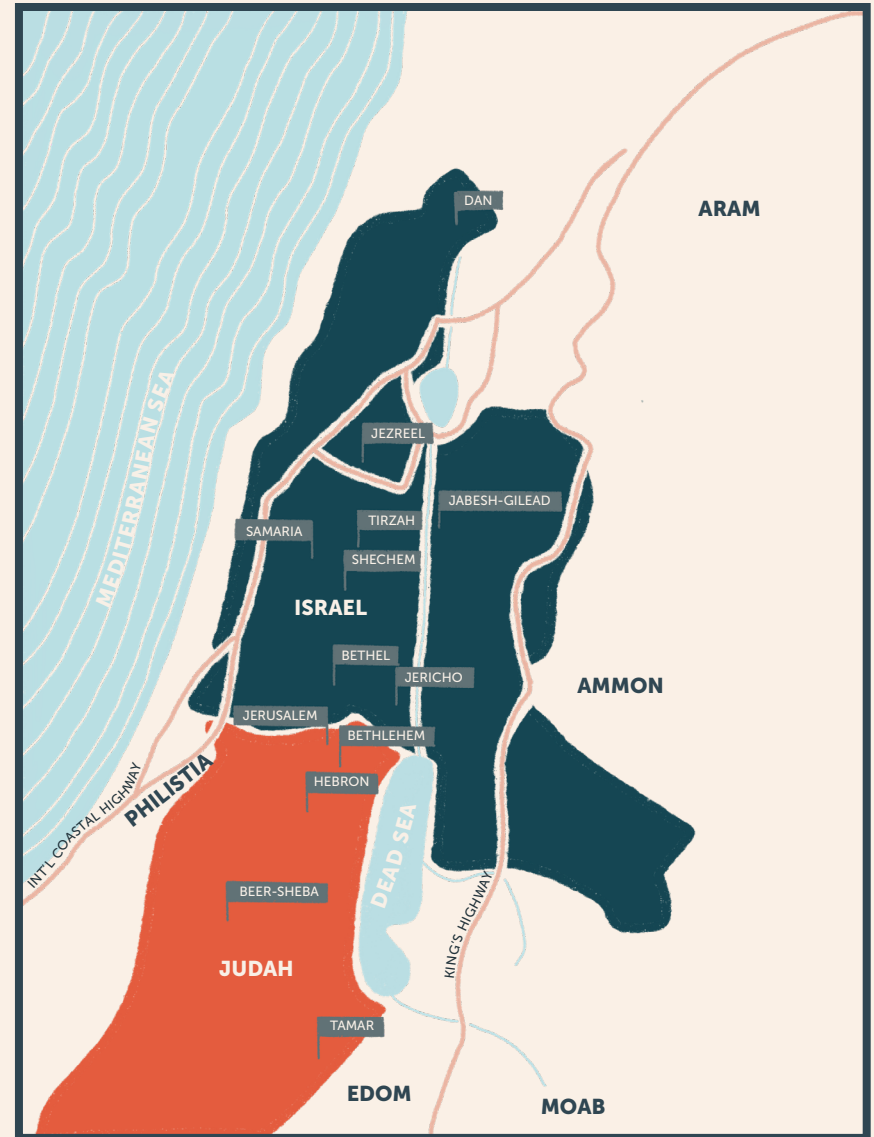
The nation of Israel was first established between 1400 and 1200 BCE, after Moses led God's people out of their captivity in Egypt and into the Promised Land of Canaan. During its inception, Israel's governance structure was a **theocracy**, meaning that God was the ultimate ruler, and that priests or others chosen by God (in this case, Moses and later Joshua) acted as his voice to the people. [For more details, read the Book of Exodus]

Following their establishment in the Promised Land, Israel was a loose confederation of 12 Tribes. Tribal leaders handled civil matters, while the Tabernacle and priests handled religious matters.

Judges, on the other hand, addressed a variety of matters on a national level to all of Israel. [For more details, read the Book of Judges]

Around 1100 BCE, the people of Israel requested that Samuel (Israel's final judge) ask God to appoint a king to rule over their nation. Although God warned against this, Samuel eventually helped lead Israel from a theocracy to a **monarchy**. Israel had only three kings who led the entire nation as a unified entity: Saul, David, and Solomon. After Solomon's death, many of the tribes were dissatisfied with the royal policies regarding labour and taxation, which led to a rupture in Israel's national unity.

two kingdoms



Divided and Conquered.

Rehoboam, Solomon's son, was next in line to rule over Israel, but his reign over the united nation didn't last long. After his refusal to make changes to policies that many people felt were unfair, 10 of the 12 tribes broke away to form their own kingdom.

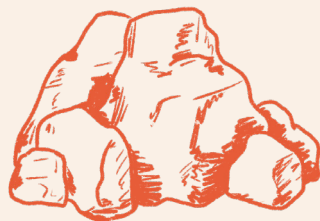
The Northern Kingdom consisted of the 10 tribes that broke away from Rehoboam's leadership: Reuben, Simeon, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Ephraim, and Manasseh. Their capital city became Samaria, and their first king was Jeroboam I. In all, the Northern Kingdom had 19 kings, but it was eventually destroyed by the Assyrians around 722 BCE. There's more to know about this kingdom, but its history isn't the focus of this sermon series.

The Southern Kingdom (where our sermon series takes place) continued to be led by Rehoboam and consisted of the tribes of **Judah** and **Benjamin**. This kingdom maintained Jerusalem as their capital, and therefore also housed the Temple. They held the bloodline of King David and the established genealogical line of Jesus on earth.

Israel's Exile to Babylon

In 605 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar II ascended to the throne of the **Neo-Babylonian Empire**. He is best known for his military campaigns and monumental construction projects in Babylon, including the Hanging Gardens, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

During his reign, Nebuchadnezzar expanded the Babylonian Empire and eventually conquered Jerusalem in **stages**. In 597 BCE, he attacked Jerusalem and carried many Israelites (including Ezekiel) into exile. After Israel pushed back under Zedekiah's leadership, Nebuchadnezzar came back to finish the job in 586 BCE, destroying the city of Jerusalem, its walls, and the Temple. Almost everyone was led into exile in Babylon.



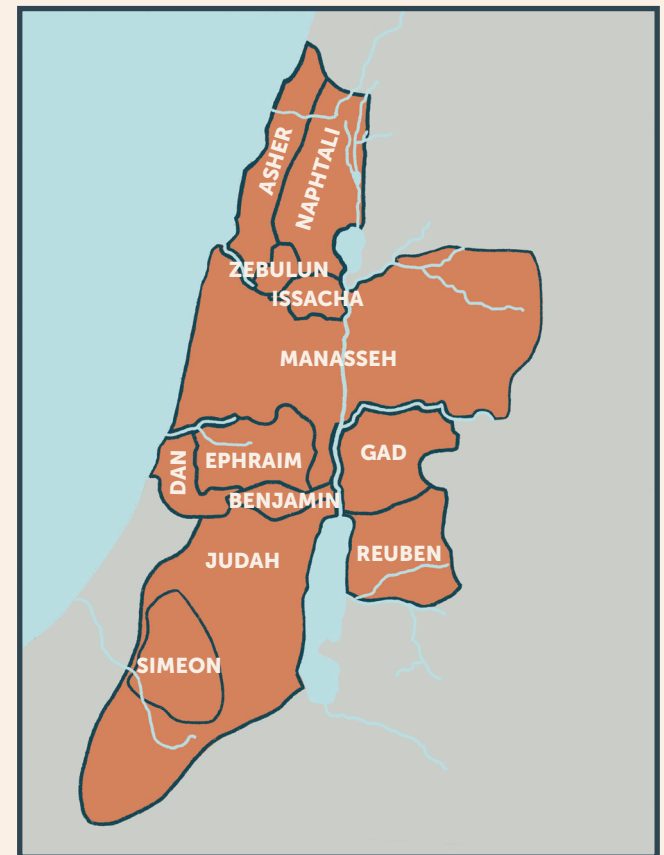
Same Exiles, Different Kingdom

As I'm sure you've discovered by now, many kingdoms rose and fell during this period, and although Babylon had it good for a while, they were overwhelmed by another nation. In 539 BCE, only a couple of generations after the Israelites were conquered, the Persian king **Cyrus the Great** conquered Babylon

with relatively little resistance. This marked the end of the Neo-Babylonian Empire and the beginning of **Persian** dominance. **And this is where our story begins.**

Ezra 1:1 says, "In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm..."

twelve tribes



Main Characters

Here's what you should know about the three main characters in our sermon series.



Zerubbabel means “Planted in Babylon”.

Descendant of King David, carrying on the royal family line

Appointed governor of the Persian province of Yehud (Judah) after Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon

Led the very first group of Jewish exiles back home to Jerusalem

Recognized in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah as a faithful civic leader and devoted follower of God



Ezra means “Helper”

A Jewish priest descended from the line of Aaron, the first high priest of Israel

A skilled scribe, deeply devoted to God's Law (the Law of Moses)

Returned to Jerusalem about 80 years after Zerubbabel's group of exiles

Focused on spiritual renewal, helping the people return to God's ways

Led the public reading of the Torah after the city walls were rebuilt — a powerful moment of recommitment



Nehemiah means “Comforted by God”

A Jewish layman who rose to a position of influence in the Persian royal court

Served as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I — a role of trust and responsibility

Known for his integrity and faithfulness to God

Asked the king for permission to return and lead another group of exiles back to Jerusalem

Guided the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls, protecting the city and restoring hope to God's people

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

Although Nehemiah arrives nearly a century after Zerubbabel and about two decades after Ezra, the leadership of these three men together represents the **full arc of Israel's post-exilic restoration**.

- Zerubbabel lays the foundation by rebuilding the altar and Temple, re-establishing worship at the heart of the nation.
- Ezra follows by restoring the authority of God's Word, renewing the community's spiritual and covenantal identity.
- Nehemiah completes the work by rebuilding Jerusalem's walls, which revived its civic life and made it secure.

Collectively, their efforts reflect a holistic renewal of Israel encompassing worship, law, and communal life.

This is an important theme in our series:

Faith is often rebuilt over a long time, and is almost always fully restored through the efforts of people working together.



Who are the three main characters in your faith development? Did all of these people arrive all at once or did they come over time?

1.

why?

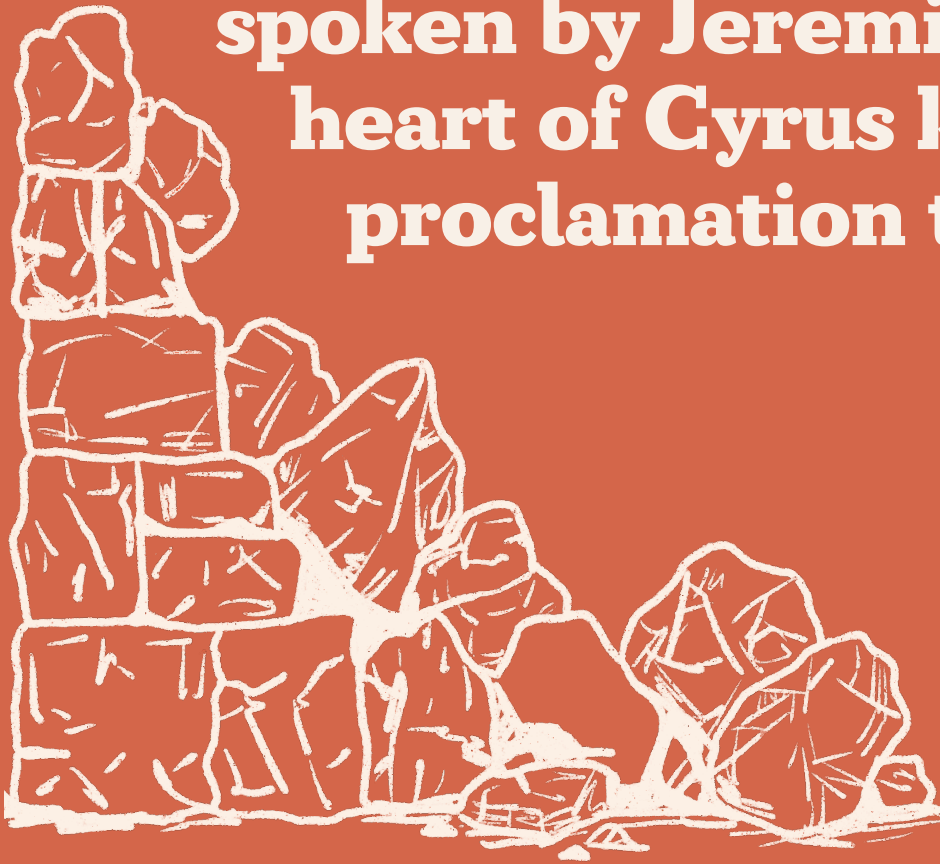
2.

why?

3.

why?

**Ezra 1:1 says,
“In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia,
in order to fulfill the word of the Lord
spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the
heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a
proclamation throughout his realm...”**



season 1

WEEK 1

introduction

Season 1 of our Ezra–Nehemiah Series invites us into a story that’s bigger than broken walls and ruined cities. It’s about people coming together to rebuild worship as the very heart of their lives with God.

In Ezra chapters 1–6, we’ll watch as God moves in surprising ways: a pagan king issues a decree that sets the exiles free, families gather the courage to leave Babylon, and a remnant makes the long journey home to ruins because they believe worship is worth rebuilding.

Week by week, we’ll see that authentic restoration always starts with a return:

- **Returning Together:** We’ll watch whole families, priests, and leaders step forward, and rebuild their faith as a community.
- **Restoring Worship First:** Before walls go up or homes are finished, the altar is rebuilt because no matter the project, worship comes first.
- **Facing Resistance:** Opposition rises quickly. Enemies threaten the work, but through faithful leaders and prophets, God’s people find the courage to keep going.
- **Finishing the Foundation:** Despite setbacks and fear, the people complete the temple’s foundation, a sign that worship will once again stand at the center of their lives.

This is more than history. **It’s an invitation for us as a church today.** In a world full of distractions, discouragement and spiritual drift, God still calls His people to come together, return to Him, and rebuild what matters.

Maybe for you, that means laying down old fears, stepping back into the church community, or putting worship back at the centre of your family’s life. Maybe it means trusting that God can bring beauty out of the rubble in your own story.

**So don’t be afraid to come back.
Don’t be afraid to rebuild.
Worship is worth it.**



reflection questions

- **What have I drifted away from that God may be calling me to return to?**
- **Who is walking with me in my faith right now, and who might I invite to walk alongside me in rebuilding?**
- **What small but intentional step could I take this week to put worship back at the center of my daily life?**

Cyrus, and the return from exile.

Ezra 1:1–11

Persia, Cyrus, and the Return from Exile

Imagine waking up one day to the news that your people, exiled for generations, have just been given permission to go home. Now, consider that this permission wasn't given by your leader, prophet or priest. It came from the king ruling the foreign land of your exile.

That would be quite a morning.

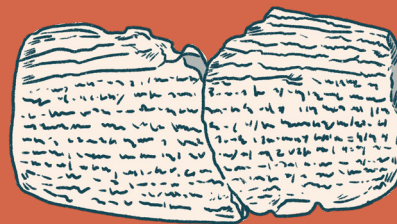
But for the Israelites, that's basically what happened.

Cyrus the Great had recently conquered Babylon, and Ezra tells us that God "stirred the heart of Cyrus" to make a decree that would shape the future of Israel. What's fascinating is that this wasn't random or a one-off political move, Cyrus had a pattern.

In 1879, archaeologists unearthed the Cyrus Cylinder, a clay record of his decrees. On it, Cyrus speaks of returning displaced peoples to their homelands and helping them rebuild their temples. Cyrus believed he was chosen by the gods (all of them) to restore order and gain their favour.

This posture helped him politically because happy subjects are more likely to be loyal. Letting exiles go home to rebuild their lives and religion made sense if you were trying to govern an empire made up of different cultures.

But there's a deeper layer. In Isaiah, Cyrus is referred to as God's anointed. That title, normally reserved for Israel's own kings and priests, was now being used for a Persian emperor. The message is clear: God's plans aren't limited to His people. He'll use anyone, even an outsider, to accomplish the promised restoration of Israel.



season 1 **WEEK 2**

This moment is more than a return from exile. It's the beginning of rebuilding a city, a temple, a people, and a faith that were surely shaken by the surrounding cultures in exile. Cyrus plays his part, but God is the one writing the script.

And maybe that's where we fit in.

Whether we're waiting in exile or stepping into something new, God's hand is still moving, often through the most unexpected people.

reflection questions

- **Where in my life do I feel like I've been in exile - displaced, delayed, or disconnected from where I'm meant to be?**
- **Have I ever seen God work through someone unexpected? Someone who doesn't even share my faith or values? How did that impact me?**
- **If God can call a foreign king His "shepherd" and "anointed," what does that say about who He chooses to use, and who I might be underestimating?**
- **Do I sometimes expect God to work only through religious or churchy avenues? What would it be like to look for Him in less expected places?**

When we think of spiritual turning points, we don't usually picture long lists of names. We picture burning bushes, parted seas, and empty tombs. But throughout Scripture, there's a clear pattern: **genealogies show up at pivotal moments in God's story.** They mark transitions, turning points, and fresh starts, not just for individuals, but for God's people as a whole.

genealogies, tribal names and covenant belonging

- In Genesis, they trace the line from Adam to Abraham, narrowing the focus of God's covenant.
- In Exodus and Numbers, genealogies organize a growing nation.
- In the Gospels, Jesus' ancestry roots Him in God's promises.

Each time, a list of names signals that God's plan is moving forward, not in the abstract, but through people with names, stories, and legacies.

This list of names in Ezra 2 might look like a census on the surface, but it's far more than that. It's a roll call of those who have remained faithful to their heritage as Israelites. These are the families who said yes to returning from Babylon, a land that had become a comfortable home for many of them, to go back to Jerusalem, a city in ruins.

One of the most fascinating aspects of biblical genealogies is how often they include unexpected individuals: outsiders, sinners, and those often overlooked. In Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, for example, we find Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba. Not exactly the cleanest family tree. But that's the point: God's story is filled with

real people, broken people, people with baggage, and yet, He weaves them into His plan, and that's what we see here in Ezra.

season 1 WEEK 3

This isn't a list of spiritual superheroes. These are everyday families who chose faithfulness in a hard moment. And their names are remembered not because they were perfect, but because they were present. Because they showed up when God said, "It's time to go home."

So, it's not just an old list, even if that's what it feels like it when you're reading it; it's a reminder that **God knows every name, honours every step of faith, and weaves every story into His redemptive plan.**

reflection questions

- What role does my personal or spiritual history play in shaping my understanding of my identity today?
- Are there people in my life who helped me find my "spiritual lineage"? Who passed faith down to me? And how can I honour or continue that legacy?
- What does it mean to me that God values names, families, and stories enough to preserve them in Scripture?
- Have I ever underestimated the spiritual importance of simply showing up? How can I reframe obedience as an act of worship?



Worship for the Israelites was about the **presence** of God. And as their history unfolded across deserts, cities, and foreign lands, their worship spaces evolved. Each shift in location brought logistical, spiritual and emotional changes. In both a figurative and literal sense, these changes represented both deconstruction and reconstruction in many ways.

The Tabernacle: Worship in Transit

In the earliest days after the Exodus, the Israelites met God in the Tabernacle, a portable sanctuary designed by God Himself and constructed under Moses' leadership in the wilderness.

Worship was sacrificial and priest-led. People watched as their offerings burned and saw the incense rise into the air, and camped around the Tabernacle in ordered tribes, with God literally at their center.

season 1 **WEEK 4**

The Temple: Worship in Glory

Under King Solomon, the Tabernacle gave way to the Temple in Jerusalem. It was majestic, permanent, and central to Israel's identity. This Temple became the heart of religious life: the destination of pilgrimage, the site of atonement, and the gathering of the whole community.

Although the building had changed, worship remained structured and priestly, with sacrifices at its centre. People could not enter the Holy Places, but they believed God's glory was in their midst.

from tent to temples: the heartbeat of worship in Israel's journey



The Synagogue: Worship in Exile

When the Babylonian Empire destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, the exiled Israelites were forced to ask the question: Without the Temple, the sacrifices, the priests, and the festivals, **how can we worship?**

Out of necessity, synagogues emerged. With no altar to approach, the Israelites turned to prayer. With no priests to lead them, elders and teachers stepped in. In a way, the focus shifted from ritual to remembrance, and from sacrifice to Scripture.



Why Rebuilding Was So Important.

When the exile ended and the Israelites returned to Jerusalem, their first act wasn't building homes; it was rebuilding the altar and the Temple. For them, the Temple wasn't just a building. **It was the emotional and spiritual center of their universe, the visible sign that God had not abandoned them and that His promises still stood.**

Imagine your home has burned down. From the street, the charred remains serve as a reminder of all you've lost. Rebuilding your home isn't only about construction, it's also about healing. It's reclaiming hope for your future.

For Israel, rebuilding the Temple was a means of reclaiming their identity as a people with whom God dwells. The Temple restoration reestablished the rhythms of sacrifice, the priesthood, and the festivals.

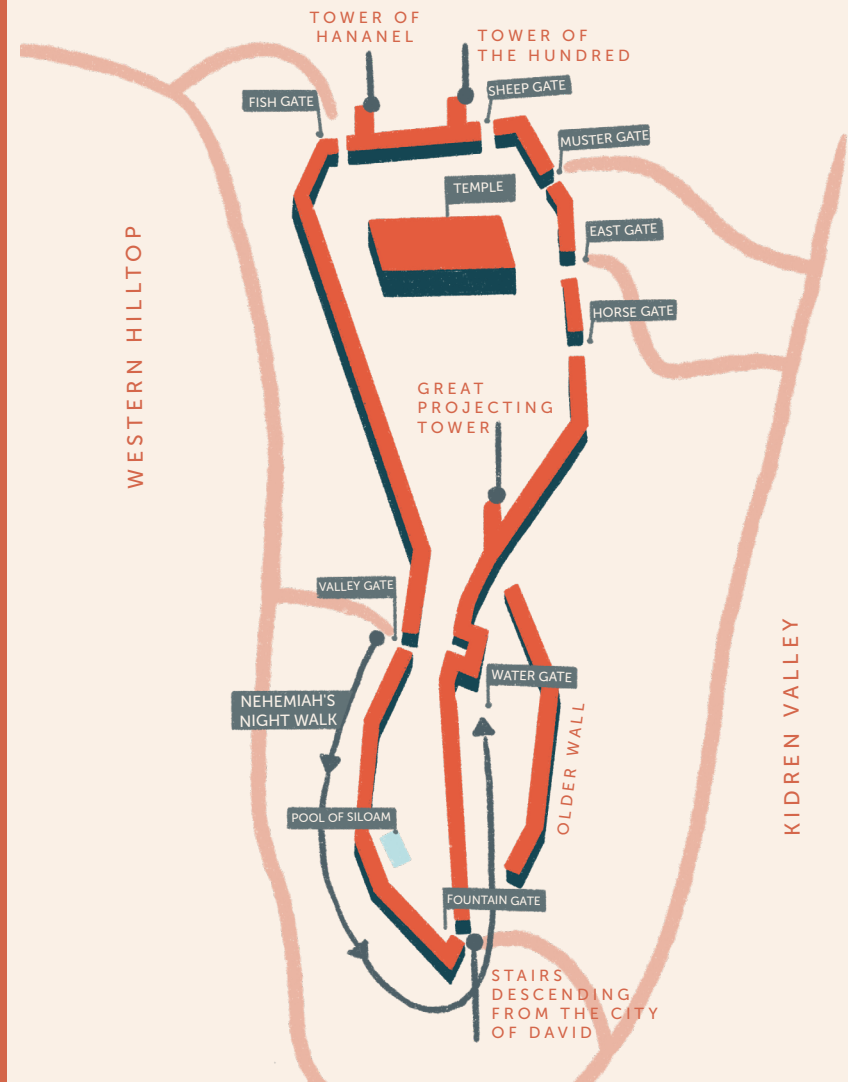
What's interesting is what they brought back from Babylon with them, a new love for Scripture and prayer that might not have existed had they not left.

reflection questions

- Where do I meet with God most consistently, in a place, a practice, or a posture?
- When physical or emotional "exile" happens in my life, how do I maintain a connection with God?
- Am I more focused on ritual or relationship in my faith journey?
- How do I respond when the way I worship has to change?



Jerusalem's Wall



pastor Mike's reflection

“A new generation of people can't afford to miss out on the gospel because I'm grumpy about what my church experience used to be.”

Sometimes I type a sentence, and then I try to figure out what it means. Here's what I came up with.

I don't think it's a sentence about rebuke or correction or shame.

It's an honest confession.

It acknowledges that the next season of 'church' will likely look different from what I've grown up with, or even what I'm experiencing right now. For some, that's an exciting thought. For others, it feels like grief or lament. I think for me, it's both.

In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, God's people were literally rebuilding their lives from the ground up. Their city, homes and Temple had been destroyed, and the systems that defined their faith were gone. When the foundation of the new Temple was finally laid, the sounds of weeping and rejoicing blended so tightly you couldn't tell them apart.

The older generation remembered Solomon's glorious Temple and mourned what had been lost. The younger generation saw progress and celebrated what was possible.

Neither reaction was wrong. But together, they show a full spectrum of the truth: Real restoration is emotional.

We're Feeling A Change Too

Today, churches face a similar tension. We want to reach new people, but often within the limits of structures designed for another time. Sunday services, denominational rhythms, buildings, committees, and programs have helped many people come to know Jesus. Yet, those same structures can feel like barriers when we try to reach a generation shaped by digital culture, institutional deconstruction, and a hunger for authentic community.

It's almost impossible to know how to balance the logistical and emotional tolls of change. If someone writes a book on how to do this well, they'll make a bazillion dollars, but I'm not sure that book is writable.

My Goal: Balance Both without Standing Still

It would be easy to bulldoze the past and declare, "It's time for something new!" But, in my opinion, that's pretty bad leadership. It's important to honour the elders who weep, take time for ourselves to catch up emotionally, and make space for lament. At the same time, we can't let our love for the past cause us to lose the future.

The next generation needs a church that is alive, not the stories of a church that used to be.

It's okay to miss what once was, and to re-use the older parts that were helpful (much like the Israelites would have used "old stones" when rebuilding the wall), but it's not okay to let that longing become an obstacle for God to do what's next. So here's what I'm working on: ensuring my grief over "the old isn't coming back" can be outweighed by the joy of knowing that God isn't finished with His church yet.

season 1
WEEK 5

season 2

WEEK 1

renew and reform



In Season 2 of our Ezra–Nehemiah series, we find God’s people at a turning point. The foundation is laid, the altar is rebuilt, but the work doesn’t move forward as easily as they hoped. Ezra 4–6 shows us that efforts to rebuild often face opposition, discouragement and distraction.

At first, the enemies of Israel use rumours, threats, and political pressure to stop the rebuilding of the Temple, and for years the work sits unfinished. But God is faithful to stir Israel again.

He does this by sending Haggai and Zechariah to revive Israel’s weary hearts, remind them of their identity, and call them back to the work they had begun.

This season, we’ll see renewal often begins where we last stopped and when we choose to reform our priorities so that worship stays at the center of our lives.

This season will cover:

- Where fear and opposition can freeze our faith (Ezra 4)
- How God’s Word and community call us back to courage (Ezra 5)
- What it looks like to reform our focus and finish what God has begun (Ezra 6)

As you work through these chapters, take time to ask: Where do I need to restart what fear has paused? What needs to be reformed in my worship, my habits, or my community life so that God stays at the centre?

This season should again remind you that we don’t do this alone.

We renew together.
We reform together.

And the same God who called Israel to finish rebuilding His house is calling us to build lives of worship that stand for generations to come.

reflection questions

- **Where have I felt opposition or discouragement slow down my spiritual growth or worship practices?**
- **Where do I see God’s faithfulness despite setbacks and delays in my spiritual journey?**
- **What is one step I can take this week to “restart the work”—to put worship, trust, and community first again?**

There's a reality when it comes to renovating a house: the project is almost never linear.

You might have a blueprint, the lists and your budget, but you're always one hammer swing away from doing something that you hadn't planned on. And now, you're managing two things, the one you started, and the one caused by the one you started.

“isn't one problem enough problems?” - Zerubbabel (probably)

I don't know if Zerubbabel knew this would happen when he led the first wave of exiles back to Jerusalem, but it did. He faced the logistical and architectural challenges of reconstruction, which in turn caused political and social tensions among the existing population. Remember, not everyone was carried off into exile, and now that people were returning to reclaim what they'd lost, those who were still there had settled into their own rhythms and didn't want them to change.

Knock Knock, Someone's Already Home.

Various people were already in Jerusalem when the first wave of exiles arrived, including the descendants of those who had been relocated by the Assyrian Empire centuries earlier. These groups, often collectively referred to as Samaritans, had a hybrid religion that combined worship of Yahweh with pagan practices. When they offered to help with the rebuild, Zerubbabel was put into a tight spot. Accepting their help would have entangled the community in mixed worship and compromised the covenantal purity required by the Law.

season 2 WEEK 2

Zerubbabel, along with Jeshua and the other elders, decisively refused their offer, citing the unique calling and permission granted by Cyrus specifically to the returned exiles. This decision, while theologically sound, had immediate socio-political consequences. The rejected locals turned to active resistance, launching a coordinated campaign of discouragement, bribery, and formal accusations against the Jewish leadership.

For Zerubbabel, this meant navigating conflict, in addition to his commitment to spiritual leadership and a massive building project. Because of this, he had to hold the community together under mounting pressure while the Temple's construction was delayed for years due to these outside interferences.



Zerubbabel Chose Mission over Method.

Zerubbabel's decision to prioritize the mission over the project's progress is one to learn from. He knew that building the building didn't matter if it didn't happen the right way. He allowed the task to take longer, so that it was done the way God called him to do it.

By standing firm, Zerubbabel preserved the theological integrity of the rebuilding project, even though it came at the cost of prolonged opposition and halted progress. It sounds right, but is it?

“Slowing down in the moments with something sounds right is sometimes what makes the difference.”

Slowing down in moments when something sounds right is sometimes what makes the difference, and it's exactly what the leaders had to do in order to finish this project well. Most people saw “progress” defined only by how many more bricks the temple had than before, but not Zerubbabel. He knew progress ran deeper than the building. He knew if the foundations weren't right, nothing built upon them would be safe.

Reconstruction takes time, and even though most detours are annoying, it doesn't mean they're all bad.

reflection questions

- How do you define progress in the church?
- What does 'church growth' look like to you?

imagining process together

Explore what real progress and growth in the church look like to you.

Step 1 | Personal Reflection

Take a few minutes to jot down your thoughts:

- What do I hope to see God do in our church in the next year?
- How would I describe a healthy, growing church community?
- What role could I personally play in helping that growth happen?

Step 2 | Big Picture Thinking

List 3 signs of church growth that aren't just about numbers. Examples might include:

- More people serving
- Deeper friendships forming
- Increased generosity
- Lives being transformed

Step 3 | Community Connection

Turn to someone nearby and share one thought from your reflection.

- What inspired you as you listened?
- Where do your answers overlap?
- Where do they differ?

When we read Scripture, it's tempting to treat each book as a stand-alone story. But the Bible isn't a collection of disconnected episodes—it's a sweeping, intertwined narrative. And sometimes, the full beauty and weight of a passage only comes alive when we realize where it sits in the story.

When we read Ezra and Nehemiah, we encounter a powerful story about rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple, which serves as a symbol of Israel's spiritual reawakening. But if we zoom out, we realize that this moment in Jerusalem's history is just one thread in a much larger tapestry. And to really understand what's happening, we need to notice who else is speaking into it, even from a distance.

season 2 WEEK 3

Enter Haggai and Zechariah

These two prophets were active during the time of Ezra, when the first wave of Jewish exiles had returned from Babylon but had stalled in their efforts to rebuild the Temple. The foundation had been laid, but years of opposition, fear, and spiritual drift had brought everything to a halt.

Haggai steps onto the scene first, and he's very direct. He is laser-focused on the fact that the people are living in panelled houses while the house of the Lord remains a ruin. He calls the people out, not to shame them, but to stir them. He reminds them that God's presence is with them and that their obedience will not be in vain. His words spark something, and the people begin to build again.

the prophets in context

Zechariah follows close behind, but his approach is different. Where Haggai is concise and urgent, Zechariah is vivid and visionary. His book is filled with symbolic dreams, angelic messages, and images that stretch into the distant future. Although more abstract in delivery, his message is just as important: God hasn't forgotten His people. Zechariah speaks of comfort, hope, and restoration—not just of buildings, but of hearts. Zechariah paints a picture of a purified priesthood (say that three times fast), a righteous king, and a people once again living securely in God's presence.

Reading these prophets in context, rather than as isolated books, brings a richness that we often overlook. Their prophecies were not just general truths—they were real-time responses to the struggles of rebuilding. They were God's voice at work in the same story, just a different chapter.

now's your moment!

There's never been a better time for you to read these two books in their entirety than right now. In lieu of reflection questions, take time this week to read and reflect on the messages sent from both prophets.



season 2

WEEK 4

Darius I



Darius I “Darius the Great”

Ruled the Persian Empire from 522–486 BCE, leading the largest empire the world had ever seen at the time

Strengthened the empire through order and structure, dividing it into satrapies (provinces) and standardizing currency, weights, and measures

Built the Royal Road and other infrastructure to connect distant provinces and maintain stability

Practiced pragmatic tolerance in religion, supporting local faiths to encourage peace and loyalty

Darius I, more widely known as Darius the Great, ruled the Persian Empire from 522 to 486 BCE, overseeing what was at the time the largest empire the world had ever seen.

His reign was marked by a commitment to **stability** through **structure**. Darius divided the empire into satrapies, regional provinces each governed by a satrap accountable to the crown. These provinces, including the **territory of Judah**, were closely monitored to prevent rebellion and ensure loyalty. He standardized currency, weights, and measures throughout the empire and constructed extensive infrastructure, including the Royal Road, to connect distant provinces and facilitate efficient communication and trade.

Darius’s legacy intersects with Scripture in his distinctive approach to religion and local governance. As a Zoroastrian, he believed in cosmic order and applied this principle to political life by supporting local religious institutions throughout the empire. For him, loyalty and peace

Darius I: the politician behind the temple

were cultivated through pragmatic tolerance. Religious autonomy, when managed wisely, became a tool for imperial cohesion.

So when local officials challenged the Jews’ right to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, Darius responded by searching the archives and verifying that Cyrus the Great had indeed authorized the reconstruction. Instead of halting the project, Darius reaffirmed the original decree and then **expanded** it. He mandated that temple expenses be paid from regional tax revenues and that sacrifices be offered regularly for the well-being of the king and his sons.

Darius’s support of the Jerusalem Temple was not accidental. It was calculated governance. By restoring sacred spaces and honouring local deities, he positioned himself as a divinely approved ruler across cultures and faiths. For the Jews, his actions represented both political permission and spiritual provision. For Darius, it was another example of imperial strategy: order preserved, rebellion averted, loyalty secured.

In the grand story of Israel’s restoration, Darius appears not as a distant foreign emperor, but as a powerful ruler whose policies and worldview created space—literally and legally—for worship to begin again.



Today's Political Landscape

It's easy to dismiss the help of a government that doesn't share our beliefs, but the story of Darius challenges that reflex. Here was a king who didn't worship the God of Israel, yet he became an instrument of God's provision. His tolerance and administrative decisions directly enabled the rebuilding of the Temple—the very heart of Jewish worship.

Sometimes God uses unexpected avenues to create space for His purposes. Often, we're quick to reject cooperation with institutions just because they aren't explicitly Christian. God's sovereignty is not limited by who sits in power, and gratitude for their help doesn't mean compromising our faith. This situation is much different from the one we read about in Ezra 4.

reflection questions

- How do you typically respond when support or resources come from someone or something outside of the Christian faith?
- Can you recall a time when someone who didn't share your faith made it possible for ministry, healing, or restoration to move forward?
- How do you discern the difference between receiving help that supports the mission of the gospel versus compromising on core convictions?



notes:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

the second temple in comparison to the first

When the Jewish exiles finally completed the Second Temple (Ezra 6), it marked a defining moment, not just architecturally, but spiritually. The structure that rose from the ruins didn't match the grandeur of Solomon's original Temple, yet it represented something just as powerful: the renewal of covenant faithfulness and a tangible return to the worship of God.

Both Temples shared a common structure. At their core, they were designed to reflect the holiness and order of God's presence. Each Temple had an outer courtyard, a Holy Place for priestly duties, and the innermost sanctuary—the Holiest Place—where only the high priest would enter once a year. This shared layout shows a continuity in how the people of Israel understood God's dwelling among them. The central purpose remained unchanged: the Temple was where heaven touched earth.

But the differences were significant and deeply felt. Solomon's Temple was a marvel of craftsmanship, funded by royal wealth, built with cedars from Lebanon, and decorated with gold, bronze, and fine linen. The Second Temple, in contrast, was built by returning exiles with fewer resources. Though they had Persian support (thanks to kings like Cyrus and Darius), the finished product lacked the splendour and majesty of its predecessor. So much so that some older Israelites wept when they saw the foundation laid, remembering what once was (Ezra 3:12; Haggai 2:3).

Beyond the architecture, the Second Temple was also missing some critical sacred elements. The Ark of the Covenant was gone. So, too, were the divine fire, the Urim and Thummim (used for seeking God's will), and the visible glory of the Lord (the Shekinah) that had once filled the sanctuary. These absences altered the way

season 2 WEEK 5

worship was conducted. The rituals were still performed according to the Law of Moses, and the Levitical priests resumed their roles, but the sense of God's tangible presence was diminished. Yet something vital remained: **the people's desire to worship.**

Ezra 6 tells us that the Temple was finished, sacrifices were offered, and the Passover was celebrated once again. Worship resumed, not in the shadow of Solomon's wealth, but in the light of restored relationship. The exiles brought what they had, offered it with sincerity, and dedicated themselves to God's ways. The glory might have looked different, but the presence of God still met His people in that space.

The Second Temple reminds us that worship doesn't depend on perfect circumstances or ornate surroundings. What mattered was that the people could come before God again, offering their hearts, remembering His promises, and renewing their faith. And in that way, though the Temple was not the same, it still served the same sacred purpose: bringing people back into communion with the God who had never stopped loving them.



season 2 WEEK 6

Passover is one of the most sacred and identity-defining celebrations in Jewish life. Instituted in Exodus 12, it commemorates the night when God “passed over” the homes of the Israelites, sparing them from the final plague and delivering them from slavery in Egypt. The meal, marked by the sacrifice of a spotless lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs, became an annual remembrance of God’s saving power. Throughout Israel’s history, Passover is a reminder of past rescue and a renewal of covenant faithfulness.

Passover Season

Ezra's Connections to Passover

In Ezra 6:19-22, the exiles celebrated the first Passover in Jerusalem since the destruction of the Temple. This Passover was more than just a feast; it was a declaration that the covenant was being reestablished and that God had not forgotten His people. They had returned to a ruined city, but by celebrating Passover, they reclaimed their identity as God's redeemed people.

We also read in Ezra 7:9 that Ezra began his journey from Babylon to Jerusalem on the first day of the first month, the month of Nisan. This means his departure was soon before the start of the Passover season. Just as Israel had once departed Egypt toward the promised land, Ezra was departing exile toward spiritual renewal. It's a quiet but powerful echo: God was writing a new Exodus story.

What's the Connection for Christians?

For Christians, Passover gets its significance through the lens of Jesus, who celebrated a Passover meal, or what we sometimes call the “Last Supper,” the night before his crucifixion. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul writes that “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” Most believe that Christ’s death at Passover wasn’t a coincidence, but it was a fulfillment of the promise that God made to His people. Just as the blood of a lamb once protected Israel from judgment, the blood of Christ now offers redemption from sin and death.

notes:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slightly textured appearance and is set against a dark background.

should we celebrate passover today?

Today, Christians are not called to keep the feast as ancient Israel did, but we are called to remember the significance of the celebration. The Last Supper, our Communion, is rooted in Passover. The bread and the cup echo the matzah and the wine. When Christians reflect on Passover, we are reminded of God's grace and mercy, His faithfulness to rescue, and the cost of our freedom through Jesus. We, too, were slaves, but now, through the cross, we are free!

Check out the Passover Seder



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reflection questions

- What does it mean to you that Jesus chose Passover as the moment to reveal the new covenant?
- Where have you seen God “pass over” your life in mercy?
- In what ways do you approach Communion today with a sense of history and awe?



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With gratitude,
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thank you.



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