



Desert Places: Learning from Exile

Date: Sunday 16th August

Speaker: Andrew McNeil

Key Verses: Jeremiah 29

Talk Summary:

What's the story: The people of God are in exile. Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian leader, has captured Jerusalem and taken many of God's people 800 miles away to Babylon. This whole 70-year exile was foretold by Jeremiah the prophet (Jeremiah 25:11)

Those in Babylon had experienced disruption of all that they knew. Where was God in all of this? How they could worship at such a bleak point in their story (see Psalm 137:1-4)

What's the promise (v5-11): In trials we often want our circumstances to change, thinking it's the answer. Jeremiah promised that in the trials, God could be known and at work for their good.

The familiar promise (v11) was both for now and for future generations. They are commanded to seek the peace and prosperity of the city they are in and God promises peace and property for them: present and future.

The big idea that God can re-purpose desert places and make them a place to meet God is expressed throughout the bible (Psalm 112:4, Ps 23:5 Ps 84:6). We let God's character, not our circumstances, set the agenda.

What was different: These people became rooted, resilient and replicable. They learned how to meet God for themselves through disruptions, trials and pain.

Smaller worshipping communities became established, that were the basis of the geographical spread of believers in the decades that followed.

Simple consistent routines to meet with God and each other were established in the hearts and homes of all those through this exile.

As we exit lockdown safely we may well have multiple gatherings, replicated in different spaces (both online and in person). How is God wanting us to become more rooted and resilient through his time?

Worship

- Why not start your time together with a centring prayer exercise, or some musical worship?
 - o More ideas at bvc.so/sgworship or bvc.so/sgprayer

Discussion Questions (choose some which are most relevant to your group)

- What does desert time look like? Disruption or trials, grief or disappointment?
- What's the difference between false hope and lasting hope?
- How does this promise in Jeremiah encourage you? (v11)
- Have you seen God work even when your circumstances don't fundamentally change?
- How should we pray for our city and region at this time? (v7)
- How can we practically seek the peace and prosperity of our city or neighbourhood?
- Churches and believers all over the world have experienced disruption. What things might God be establishing in his followers through this time? How we might become more rooted, resilient and replicable?