



Sunday Evenings at St Mary's, Portchester (Autumn 2020)

“Returning from Exile”

Drawing inspiration, challenge and comfort from those who have been here before.

No. 1 “By the Rivers of Babylon”

“By the rivers of Babylon we sat down, and there we wept when we remembered Zion.” (Psalm 137:1)

Lessons from history for today

- The current Coronavirus pandemic: we have never been here before.
- But our ancestors have
- Plagues and pandemics in history: The Spanish Flu (1918) The Great Plague (1665); the Black Death (14th century); the village of Eyam in Derbyshire (1666)
- The Old Testament story of Israel is *our* story (1 Cor 10:1-6)
- What is God saying today through all this?

Israel: united and divided

- The most traumatic event ever to have happened to ancient Israel.
- After the conquest of Canaan, 9 tribes settled in the north (Reuben, Manasseh, Issachar, Zebulun, Ephraim, Dan, Asher, Naphtali and Gad) and 3 in the south (Benjamin, Judah and Simeon) Eventually Simeon was absorbed between them, leaving 10 in the north and 2 in the south.
- After the death of Saul, the start of division among them: the north loyal to the House of Saul; the south loyal to King David.
- The united kingdom under David and Solomon
- After the death of Solomon became two independent kings of Israel (north) and Judah (south)

The religious background to the Exile

- Israel and the Covenant; Blessings and curses (*Deuteronomy 28*) Obedience= blessings; disobedience= curses. Particularly the curse of deportation and exile (v 64)
- Deuteronomy 28 is the basis for teaching on the “prosperity gospel” (“God wants you healthy and rich!”), but cannot be applied to Christians under the New Covenant.
 - Only given to the nation of Israel, no other nation or individual in the New Testament is promised this.
 - Many obedient and faithful Christians in the New Testament suffered what Deuteronomy 28 would call a ‘curse’: Paul & poverty (2 Cor 11:27; Phil 4:12) Antioch believers and famine (Acts 11:27-30); Timothy sick and could not be healed (2 Tim 4:20); martyrdom (Revelation 6:9-11); most early Christians were at the bottom end of society (1 Cor 1:26-31).
 - The relationship between God and Israel was based on a Covenant (like a marriage) which God initiated. He has not entered into such a Covenant with any other nation. So unfaithfulness in a marriage is more serious than walking out of a friendship.
 - The blessings of Deuteronomy are entirely physical, material and to do with this world only; the blessings under the New Covenant are more spiritual and heavenly.
 - They are ‘works’ based rather than by grace (Ephesians 2:8)