



## PART 8 – EXILE & RETURN

### DISCUSS AND APPLY

#### **Discuss – questions to help understanding**

1. Do you think human history tells any overarching story? Might God be working out His purposes through the rise and fall of nations?

*Read Daniel 9*

2. What does Daniel discover and how does he discover it (verses 1-3)?
3. Daniel was living in exile far from Jerusalem, having been taken to Babylon in his youth. What does his prayer tell us about the reason why the Israelites had ended up there (verses 4-14)?
4. What does Daniel ask God to do and why does Daniel think God should do it (verses 15-19)?
5. What do Gabriel's words in verses 20-23 tell us about the relationship between God and His people?
6. What do we learn from verses 24-27 about the work God's Anointed One must do and the timing of his coming? Who do you believe this Anointed One was?
7. Daniel 7 suggests that the Bible explains God's story behind human history (Daniel looks back to Moses and Jeremiah and receives words about the future). Do you believe this could be so?

#### **Apply – questions to help personal application**

- Do you see the sins that plagued Israel – idolatry, hypocrisy and injustice – in our society today? What about in your own life?
- God led Israel through the humbling experience of exile, so they could be purified in their worship of Him. Do you think God might do something similar in the lives of individuals today? Is that fair or good?
- Do you struggle to believe that God is sovereign over human history and international affairs? Would the ancient Israelites have struggled that way in their time?
- Based on your understanding so far, what do you think the Bible reveals as the true story of humankind and God's purposes for us? Is this different from what you believe or what the media portrays to us?
- Do you believe that Jesus could have been the fulfilment of the programme for history God revealed through Daniel and of the prophecies about God's conquering king and suffering servant?

### ***Could prophets really have predicted future events with such accuracy?***

This question is not unlike the question addressed after Part 5 concerning the possibility of miracles. Many people struggle to believe that prophecies could have predicted the future. Some scholars of the Bible claim the prophecies about people like Cyrus (in Isaiah) and the world kingdoms (in Daniel) indicate a late date for these books or were added to them after the events. Their basis for this is, ultimately, that they cannot accept the possibility of predictive prophecy. This creates huge problems for the prophecies contained in the New Testament and other Old Testament prophecies that have not yet been fulfilled. It also cannot explain the accuracy of Daniel's prophecies about the timing of the Messiah, since Daniel cannot have been written or altered after the time of Jesus.

Once we accept that God exists and is actively involved in human history, the problem is resolved (even if it remains difficult for us to believe from our modernistic mindset). God gave these words to the prophets and they contain truths that only God could know. This is the essential nature of the Christian faith. It is not based on human reason or opinion, but on truth about God, His actions in history and His plans for the future, revealed by God in human words through human people. It is, fundamentally, a prophetic religion telling us things we could not know unless God had told us them.

### ***Is God still in control of international affairs?***

The Bible consistently describes God's rule over human history. He is the one who raises kings and nations and makes them fall and who determines the extent of their power (Daniel 2:21; Acts 17:26). No human being can occupy a position of authority without His permission (Romans 13:1). As explained in the Q&A after Part 6, this does not mean that God approves the actions of these rulers and peoples, but that He uses them to accomplish His greater purposes. At times in the Scriptures God's people struggled to understand how this could be – most notably the prophet Habakkuk who struggled with God's plan to use the Babylonians to judge Judah – but the message of the Bible is consistent – God is sovereign. The book of Daniel, in particular, emphasises God's sovereignty over the great empires of his time and beyond. From a human perspective they may look powerful and God's people may appear puny by comparison, but God is at work through everything. This confidence in the eternal purposes of God is also seen in the New Testament, for example in Romans 8, where the apostle Paul says that God works in everything for the good of His people (v28) and that nothing, including powers on earth, can thwart His loving plan for them (v38-39).

All of this means that we can say with confidence that God continues to work through the rise and fall of nations and civilisations today. We must, however, be wary about jumping to conclusions about what God's purpose is in all of this. Like Habakkuk, we may get a surprise if God told us. Many Christians believe there are some details in biblical prophecy about world events that must happen before the return of Christ, but we would be wise not to be dogmatic about details and to remember that no one knows the date. What we can be certain of is that God's purposes will not be defeated. Revelation provides a glorious insight into the battle that rages behind human history between God and Satan but shows clearly that though the Lamb who died (Jesus), God will be victorious and will bring human history to a very good conclusion.

### ***Why were the people called Jews after the exile?***

The term 'Jew' is a contraction of Judah since the people who returned from exile had come from the southern kingdom of Judah. The name Judah itself means either 'praised' or 'submission' and Jews were people who gave praise to Yahweh as they submitted to His Law. The words Jew and Jewish are not used in the Bible until the time of the Exile (before that the people are more properly called Israelites). The Jewish religion today is not the same as the Israelite religion before the exile. In part this reflects developments during the exile, when the reading of the Law became more central, the sacrificial system was not in operation, and the practice of meeting in houses of prayer called synagogues developed. These changes were compounded when the Romans destroyed the restored Temple in AD 70 and as the Jews lived scattered among other nations rather than in their own land. Modern usage of the word 'Jew' is complicated by the fact that it can refer either to the ethnic group descended from the biblical Jews (and ultimately from Jacob) or to an adherent of the religion.