

Life beyond lockdown: lessons from the book of Ezra

Student RML weekend
5–6 June 2020



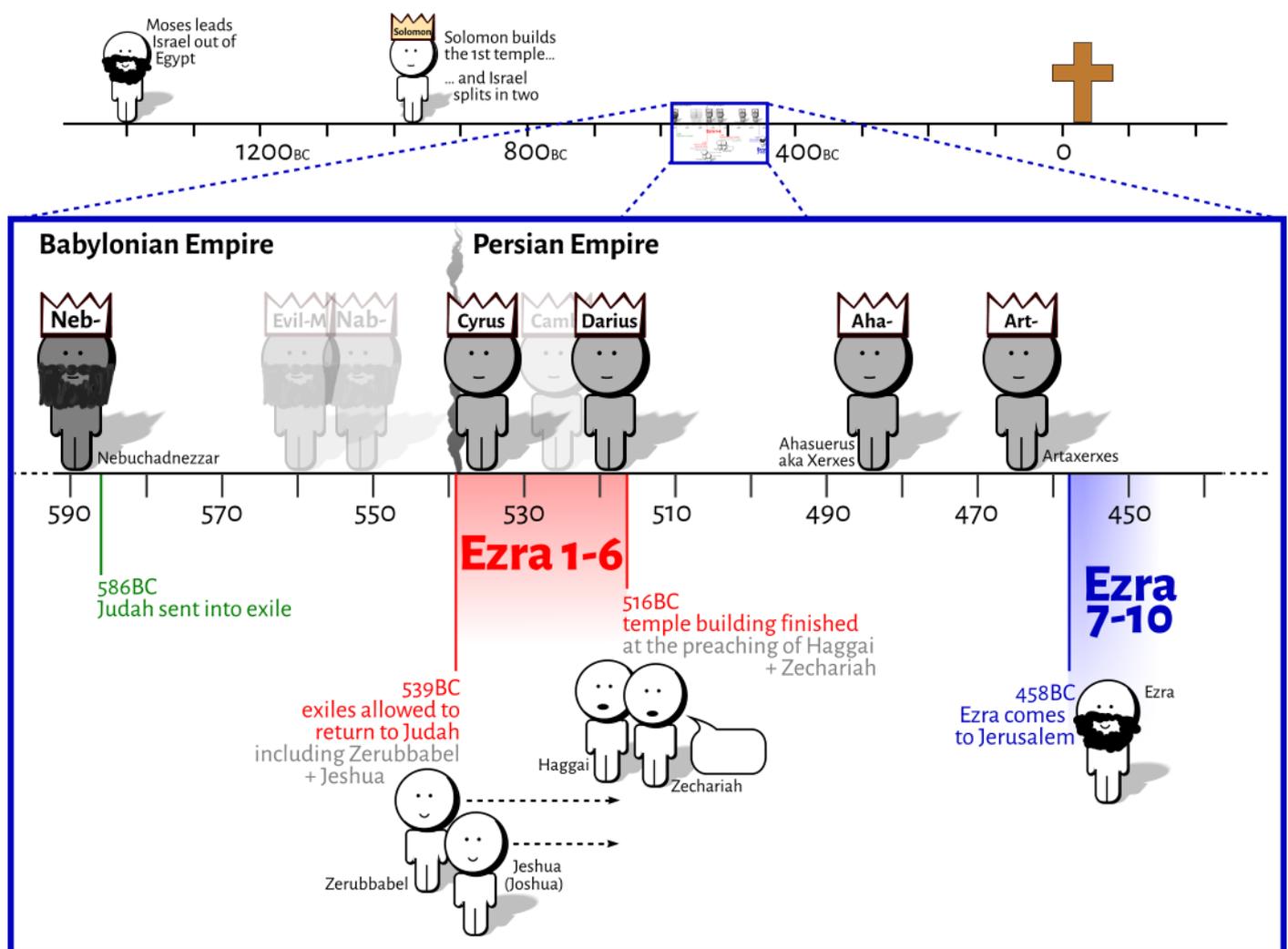
A brief introduction to Ezra

The relationship of God to his people, Israel, is the subject of many of the Old Testament history books – and it charts a pretty shaky course. There are high moments (like Moses leading Israel out of captivity in Egypt in the Exodus, and King Solomon building a temple for the LORD). But there are also low moments (like the splitting of the nation into two separate kingdoms, “Israel” and “Judah”).

The books of 1–2 Chronicles look particularly at the history of the southern kingdom, Judah, especially in terms of its royalty and priesthood. However, the end of those books charts the decline of the nation, as her rebellion against God is punished. The nation is conquered by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, the temple is destroyed, and the people are sent into exile.

The outlook **could** look pretty grim, but God had made some amazing promises to rescue his people out of exile and establish a new relationship with them. Through the words of prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, the people of God were pointed forward to an amazing future of profound blessing.

Ezra is filled with expectancy for the fulfilment of those promises, picking up where 1–2 Chronicles left off. The Persian king Cyrus has just taken over Babylon, and is sending the exiles home...



- **Ezra 1–6** covers the period immediately after the exile, with the first group to return to the land of Judah, and the building of the temple.
- **Ezra 7–10** looks at a period nearly 60 years later, when the scribe Ezra comes to check up on how things are going

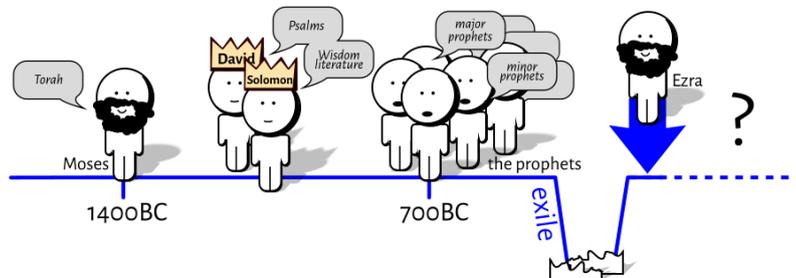
If you are ever lost for the historical background to Ezra, you can watch the [Introduction to Ezra animation](#) to give a brief reminder of the events leading up to the book.

Talk 1: Who's driving? (Ezra 1–3)

Have a read of Ezra 1–3.

What would it have felt like to belong to this group of people who got to return home?
How do you think you would have responded to the foundation of the temple?

Introduction



God is in the driving seat



Key lesson #1:

What has God promised?

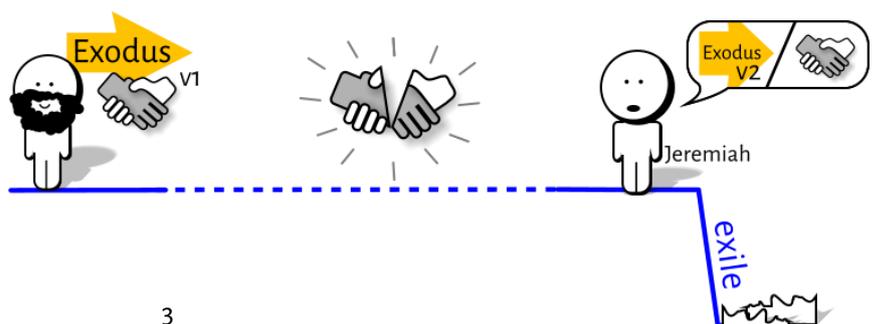
“...that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled...” (Ezra 1:1)

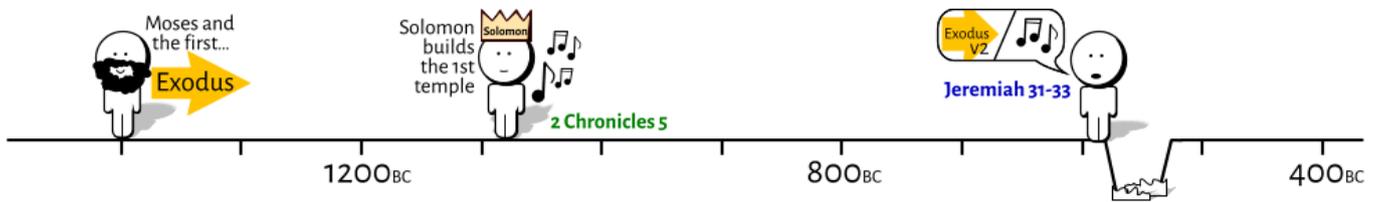
¹⁰“For thus says the Lord: When **seventy years** are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

¹¹For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” (Jeremiah 29:10–11)

³¹“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³²**not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband**, declares the LORD. ³³For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (Jeremiah 31:31–33)

cf Jeremiah 16:14–15





Jeremiah 33:10–11

“... there shall be heard again ... the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD:

“Give thanks to the LORD of hosts, **for the LORD is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!**”

For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the LORD.

2 Chronicles 5:13 (cf 7:3)

“...and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD,

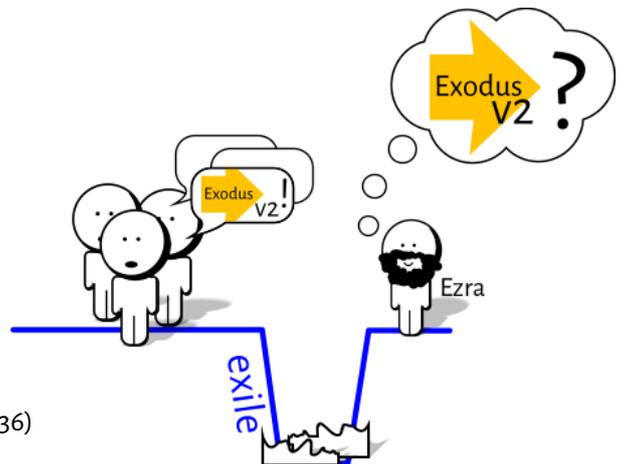
‘For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever,’

the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.”

Is this it?

The return: a new Exodus?

- captivity (Ezra 2:1 twice)
- plundering their captors (Ezra 1:4, 6; cf Exodus 3:21–22, 12:35–36)
- the Feast of Booths (3:4; cf Leviticus 23:41–43)
- Joshua? (2:2; 3:2,8)



The temple: a new start?

3:8–11



Key lesson #2:

But...

3:12–13



Implications

The God who is in control

The promises he is (and is not) fulfilling

Questions for discussion and reflection

- What makes it hard to believe that God is in control?
- Why is it important to remember **how** God is using his control? How would you explain Jeremiah 29:11?
- What would it feel like to have been part of the group returning from exile? How does their experience help us to trust that God is in control?
- How much do you think about the promises of God day-to-day? Why do you think that is?

Talk 2: Are we going the right way? (Ezra 4–6)

Have a read of Ezra 4–6.

What would be running through your head if the accusation in 4:15 / 4:19 was made against you?
How would you feel if you were in the group in 6:16?

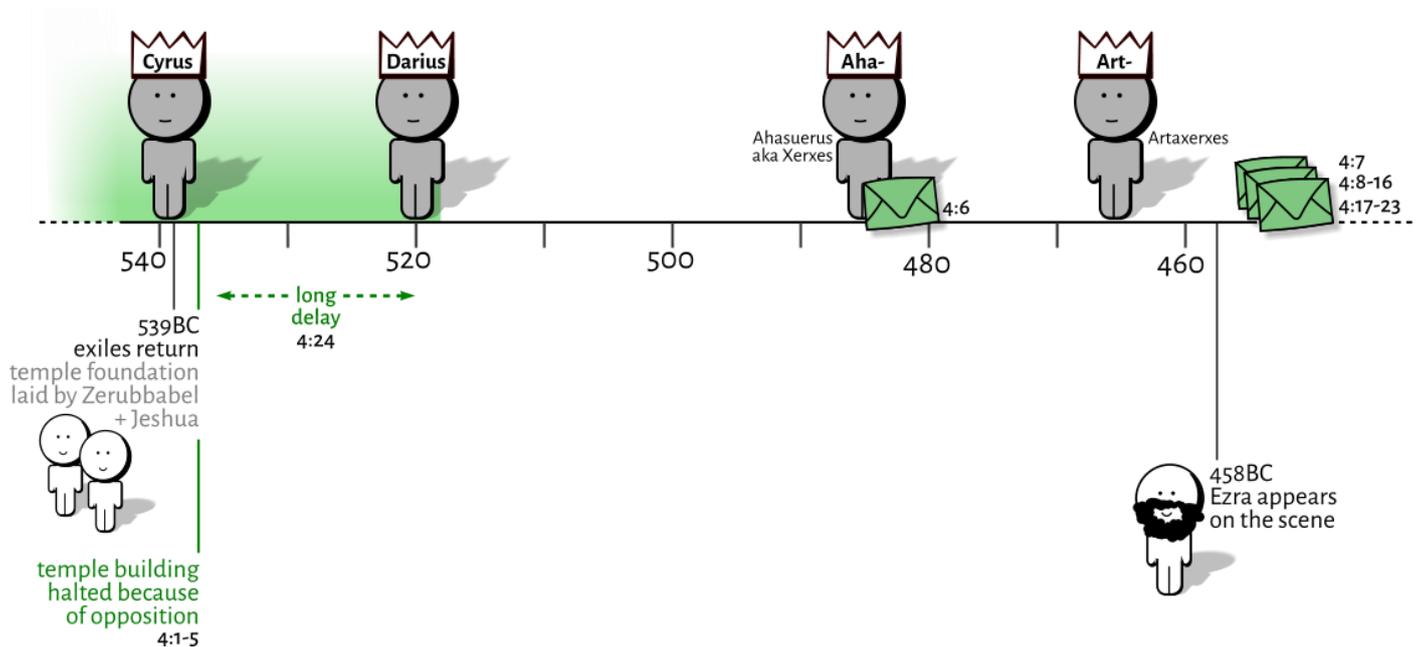
When the road gets rough

Bumps in the road (4:1–24)

The faithfulness that upsets – 4:1–5

(The accusation that sticks – 4:6–23)

The work that suffers – 4:24



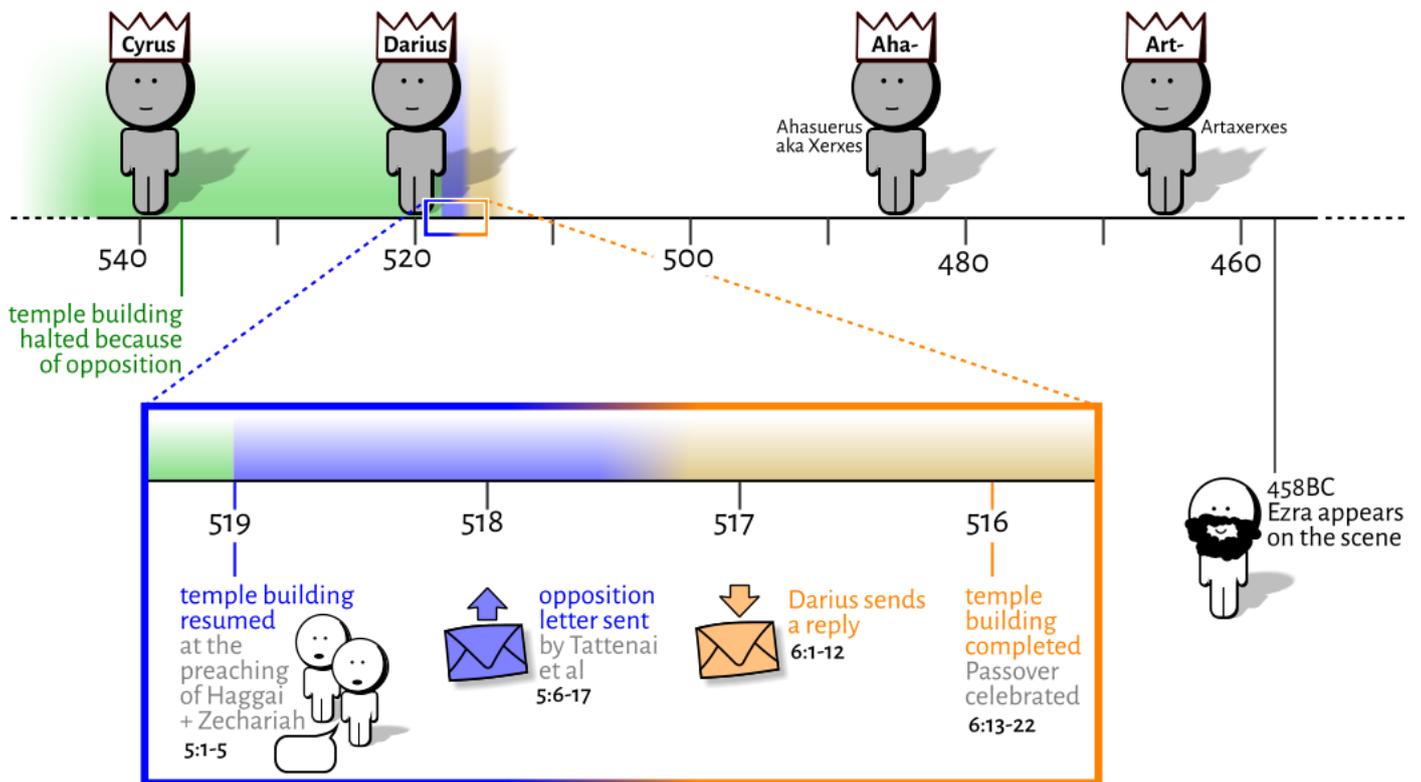
A boost and a barrier (5:1–17)

“Who gave you a decree...?” (v3, v9)

The breakthrough decree (6:1–22)



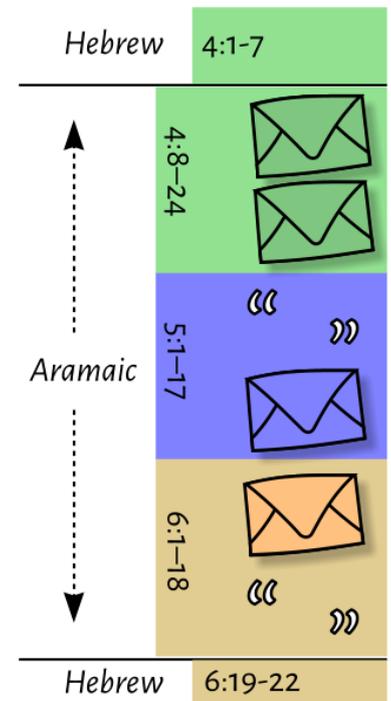
Key lesson #3:



A lesson...

...for the world

... for the people of God



Is this it?

Questions for discussion and reflection

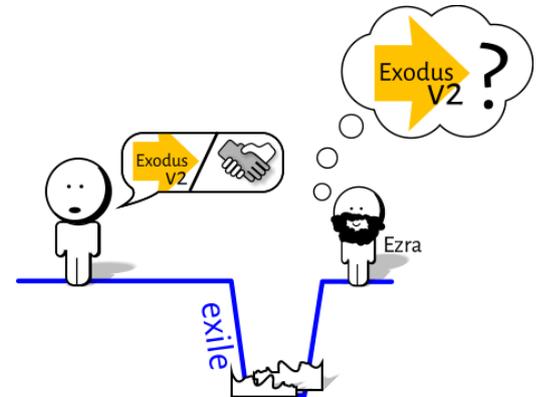
- What are the implications of saying that “our God is the God of heaven” to someone who isn’t a Christian? What are the different reasons that people might have for disliking that?
- Has anyone ever said to you, “You’re not one of **those** Christians, are you?” What did they mean?
- How would you feel if the accusation in 4:15 / 4:19 were made against you, or a Christian group that you were involved in?
- What do these chapters have to say to people who aren’t Christians?
- How do these chapters help us to see the goodness of belonging to God’s people?
- How do these chapters persuade us to stay faithful to God and what he says in the Bible?

Talk 3: Are we nearly there yet? (Ezra 7–10)

Have a read of Ezra chapters 7–10.

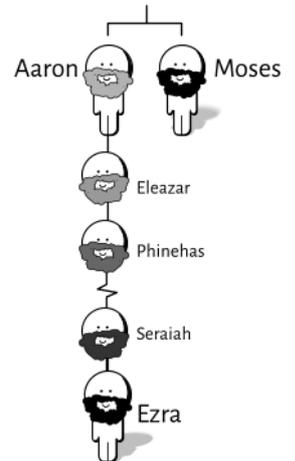
Ezra is sent to Judah to check on how they're doing. How does he get on?

A question that really matters



Ezra's quest (7:1–8:36)

A new Aaron (7:1–10)



A fulfilling mission? (7:11–28)

“For you are sent ...

1. ...to make enquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the Law of your God, which is in your hand,
2. and also to carry the silver and gold that the king and his counsellors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem...”

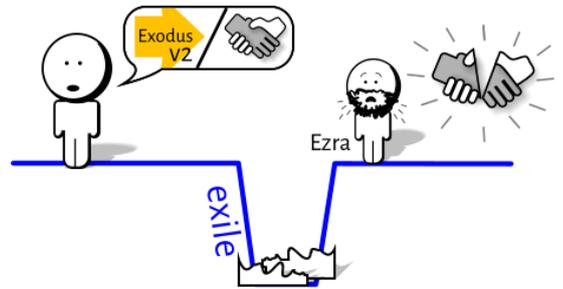
(v14–15)

The beautiful house (8:1–36)

Ezra's answer (1): a resounding "no" (9:1–10:44)

The devastating report (9:1–10:15)

cf Deuteronomy 7:1–4

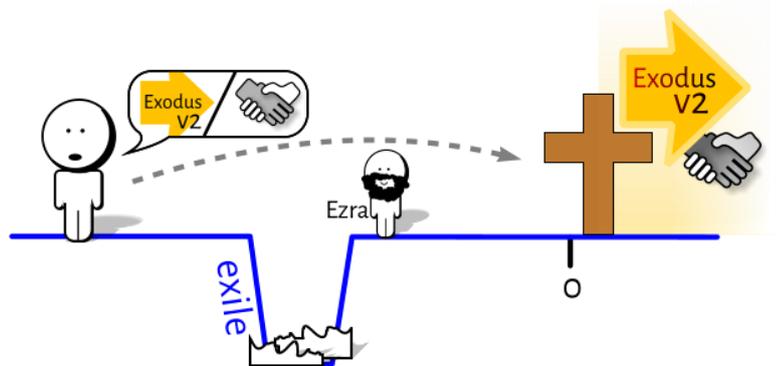


The damage assessment (10:16–44)



Key lesson #4:

Ezra's answer (2): Jesus

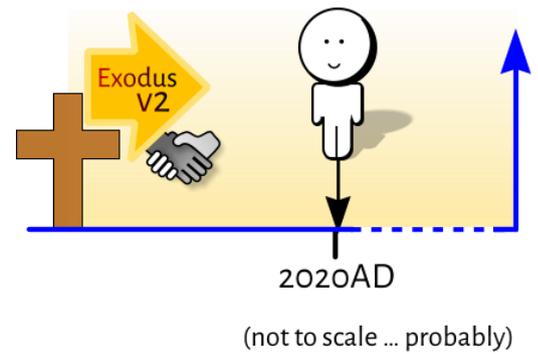


"This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many."
(Mark 14:24)

"But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises." (Hebrews 8:6)

"For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified." (Hebrews 10:14)

Where are we?



Key lesson #4 (revisited):

Life beyond lockdown?

Questions for discussion and reflection

- “Are we nearly there yet?” What’s your answer?
- How does their disappointment (chapters 9–10) help us to appreciate what we have in Jesus?
- “**Their** celebrations should really be **our** celebrations.” How can we help each other appreciate where we find ourselves in salvation history?
- “We’re not there yet.” Why does that matter? What difference should it make?
- What sort of picture of God do we get in the book of Ezra?
- How has the book of Ezra helped us see the significance of what God is doing?