

“Return from Exile- A Lenten Journey”
Take Home Bible Study



Lent is the journey we make as we travel with Christ from the Mount of Transfiguration to Jerusalem, where He will face the cross and the grave for our sake. This year's theme focuses upon the journey, though perhaps not in the way we usually walk it. Our overall theme is "Return from Exile: A Lenten Journey."

The beginning of our journey is exile in the wilderness of sin and death. From the first sin in the first garden, we have been exiled into the wilderness where we have wandered without any ability to find our way out. But every journey also has a destination. Our return from exile brings us into the promised land, the perfect place, the new garden, the courts of heaven—the ultimate destination which was established for us by Jesus' death and resurrection.

There is great joy in the journey as we see where our returning brings us; but there is also a somber attitude when we consider what Christ faced on account of our sin. Each leg of our Lenten journey begins in the Old Testament and continues into the New Testament, pointing us to the joy that is ours on account of Christ Jesus. The sermons and resources in this series give the hearers opportunity to contemplate the reality of their earthly journey, but with eyes always fixed on its destination—the empty tomb and the open gates of everlasting life—and with an underlying reality of joy as we hear proclaimed again that we do not walk this way alone!

When you have finished each weeks Home Bible Study... go to the Saint Paul Lutheran website under the "Pastor" tab for Pastor Brand's notes, and answers and musings on many of the Bible Study question.

ASH WEDNESDAY

THE GARMENT

INTRODUCTION

What Not to Wear, Say Yes to the Dress, runway models, fashion shows, styles and colors, advertisements and sales, back-to-school clothes, prom dresses and tuxedos, graduation gowns and apparel, wedding and funeral attire—obviously, clothing is a big deal in our society. And not just when it comes to the big events of life, but even the everyday journeys are more often than not wrapped up in clothing.

Holy Scripture also has a great deal to say about clothing—about garments—but why?

Read Genesis 3:1–7, 20–21. This is the beginning of the garment motif in the Bible. Before the fall into sin, Genesis 2:25 tells us, “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” Now, however, they have sinned by eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now, they are sinners and they have shame, and shame must be covered. Adam and Eve know this, so they attempt to cover their nakedness, their shame, their sin, with fig leaves. Of course, they are not too certain this will work, so they also hide in the bushes. After all, who wants God to see their sin?

1. In these two passages, Genesis 3:1–7, 20–21, we see two examples of garments: fig leaves and animal skins. How do these garments differ?
2. Why are fig leaves not good enough for God?
3. Man attempts to cover up his sin, to hide it from God. How does this work out for him?
4. As you consider this, think of man’s situation in the world, past and present. Has there ever been a time when man’s attempts to cover up the shame of his sin have worked?
5. Why are man’s attempts lacking?
6. Give current examples of man trying to hide, cover up, or pay for his own sins.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

The Hebrew Old Testament uses a variety of nouns for the word *clothing*. Often, people make clothing of their own designs to cover their nakedness and make themselves appear presentable, despite their sin. Sometimes, however, clothing is given as a gift to adorn and beautify persons for particular occasions, even to stand before God (e.g., Isaiah 61:10; Ezekiel 16:8–13; Zechariah 3:3–5).

7. How do these two uses of clothing take us back to the Garden of Eden?
8. Read Genesis 27:1–24; 37:3–4, 18–33; 38:12–23; 39:6–20. In each of these familiar stories, garments play an important part. However, the garments are not only of man’s own design, but they are also used by man to accomplish his purposes. Tell how garments are used to deceive in each story. On the surface, who is trying to be in control—man or God?

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

As you read the Genesis accounts, you may have noticed some recurring themes or motifs within the garment motif. These minor themes are very important in our understanding of the meaning, the direction, and the fulfillment of the overall garment theme. In fact, we can see them intersect later in the institution of the Day of Atonement.

9. List some of the reoccurring themes or motifs within the garment motif.
10. Read Leviticus 16:1–24. Note the intersecting threads in the institution of Yom Kippur—The Day of Atonement. What does each remind you of?
11. What do you think all of this is pointing to? Explain your answer.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The prophet Isaiah helps us to see where this garment motif has come from, but even more important, he helps us to see where it is going!

12. Read Isaiah 64:6 and 61:10. How does Isaiah 64:6 remind you of Genesis 3 and the fig leaves? How does Isaiah 61:10 remind you of Genesis 3 and the animal skins?

ON TO THE LIFE OF CHRIST

All biblical motifs go through the life of Christ, and the garment motif is no exception. It is interesting to note all of the garments and the important role they play in the Christ story.

13. Take some time to compile a list of all the garments that appear in Christ’s life. Especially consider His birth and death, Holy Week, and the parables. Do you notice the reversal of the motif?

Note then the reversal of this garment motif in Jesus. In this motif, the theme of covering and hiding sin and shame is obvious. However, in Jesus we see His garment removed and He hangs naked on the tree of the cross.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. When Christ hangs naked on the cross, we do not see His sin and shame, we see our sin and shame. We who have tried to hide the reality of our sin have had it revealed in Christ—only to have the sin and shame washed away with His holy and precious blood. And, in the words of Isaiah, “He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; He has covered me with the robe of righteousness” (61:10).

THE FINAL FULFILLMENT

14. The garment motif continues to its fulfillment. Read Revelation 7:9–13 and 19:6–8. Identify the various aspects of the garment motif in these texts. Note how they have found their way from Genesis all the way to Revelation. What is it that identifies the saints of God who dwell eternally in heaven?

CONCLUSION

The blood of the Lamb cleanses us from all sin and shame and provides the white robe of righteousness and garments of salvation for man. And, as a result, they stand in the courts of heaven before the throne of God forever and ever. Now we see why garments are so important in the pages of God’s Word—they show our sin, but then they show us our Savior! They point us to Christ, our Bridegroom who adorns us, clothes us as His Bride, the Church.

MIDWEEK OF LENT 1

THE GARDEN

INTRODUCTION

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon is one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, which represent structures of architectural grandeur and advanced engineering. And it was quite unique from the other six wonders. By no means any less impressive and meticulously constructed, it was the lush beauty of the trees and vegetation in contrast to the surrounding arid plains that was so striking. The purpose of these gardens was nothing other than rejuvenation and pure pleasure, and gardens continue to serve this purpose today.

Step into the gardens of Scripture—there are more than you may realize—and you will find that they become the backdrop for a more beautiful reality than the gardens themselves, and they have an eternal purpose!

READ GENESIS 2:4–24.

1. Eden is the first garden of Scripture, as well as the most well-known. Describe how you envision this first garden. What are some specific words you would use in your description?

READ GENESIS 3:8

2. What does this verse suggest about the relationship between God and man in the beginning?

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

READ GENESIS 2:16–17

3. These verses tell us what was good for man and what was pleasing to God. They also help us to know God's overall plan for man and for his relationship to God. Discuss what this plan might be.

READ GENESIS 3:1–13, 22–24

4. What are the consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience?

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

READ GENESIS 3:15

5. What does this verse tell us about God's reaction to Adam and Eve being separated from Him? What is His solution?

READ EXODUS 3:7–8; NUMBERS 13:21–27; DEUTERONOMY 8:7–10; JOSHUA 5:6

6. As you read these texts, note the similarities in language to the Garden of Eden and discuss them. Notice the contrast between the land of slavery and the Promised Land and the wilderness and the Promised Land.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

READ JEREMIAH 31:1–14

7. Is Jeremiah talking about the original Garden of Eden, referring to the Promised Land of Israel, or talking about the courts of heaven? What is the relationship between the three?

READ EZEKIEL 36:33–36

8. How does Ezekiel help us understand the garden motif?

ON TO THE LIFE OF CHRIST

All biblical motifs go through the life of Christ, and so it is Christ who points us forward to the overall fulfillment of the garden motif.

READ LUKE 23:39–43

9. What is it that Jesus promises to the believing criminal?
10. The Church has always equated “paradise” with heaven. It is important to know that “paradise” is a Persian word which refers to a beautiful, walled garden. Once again, what is it that Jesus promises the criminal?

THE FINAL FULFILLMENT

READ REVELATION 22:1–5

11. The garden motif continues to its fulfillment. This is a description of heaven. How does it resemble the Garden of Eden? What is the reward of the faithful believer?

CONCLUSION

God created a beautiful garden where man would dwell with Him in a perfect relationship. However, when man disobeyed God and ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he was expelled from the garden and separated from God. This was a terrible tragedy, one that God could not abide. Thus, in His grace and mercy, God opens the gates of the new and better garden with the blood of His Son, Jesus. Once again, by God's design, man and God's relationship is restored, and we will walk together in the courts of everlasting life—from garden to garden!

MIDWEEK OF LENT 2

THE MOUNTAIN

INTRODUCTION

Mountains are majestic, mountains inspire us, mountains have symbolic meaning for us—as in “climb every mountain,” or “a mountaintop experience.” Mountains are amazing geological structures that some people cannot live far from and others cannot help but climb. But do they also cause us terror and dread, or cause emotions of stability and power to well up? Perhaps the early pioneers, as they forged their way west, saw mountains as obstacles and were overwhelmed by what stood in the way. How do you view mountains? God’s people in the Scriptures often saw mountains as the dwelling place of God. Or, they associated mountains with the presence of God—the place where heaven meets earth.

Look to the mountains in God’s Word and discover a place where God meets man and where the Lord provides for all of man’s greatest needs.

READ GENESIS 22:1–14

1. Here we encounter one of the Bible’s first significant mountaintop moments. Why has Abraham come to Mount Moriah? Note and list the details of the journey and the final results. What is the special phrase associated with this mountain?

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

READ EXODUS 19:1–15

2. Mount Sinai is a well-known mountain in the pages of Scripture. Why did Moses bring the Israelites to Mount Sinai? How did God show His presence on this great mountain? How were the people to respond to this presence? Why?

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

SKIM THROUGH EXODUS 20–31

3. What are the things that God provides for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai? What is the overall purpose of all these provisions?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

READ ISAIAH 25:6–10

4. Isaiah points us forward to the final fulfillment of the mountain motif. What are the particulars of the holy mountain of Isaiah? Who is invited to come to this mountain? What is it that the Lord provides on this mountain? When will this great banquet take place?

ON TO THE LIFE OF CHRIST

The mountain motif extends into the life of Christ. Do a quick review of the various mountains that play important roles in the life of Jesus.

READ JOHN 6:1–14

5. Again, on a mountain the Lord provides. How does heaven meet earth on this mountaintop? Who is providing the meal? Do the people gathered understand what has just happened? How do they respond?

READ JOHN 19:16–22

6. Golgatha (Mount Calvary) is a mountain that brings both pain and joy to the Christian. Ponder that reality! Why is it that Jesus is not sacrificed/crucified on Mount Zion?

READ LUKE 23:44–49

7. When Jesus dies on Mount Calvary, the temple curtain (on Mount Zion) is torn in two. How is this a continuation of the mountain motif? Hint: The Lord provides; heaven and earth come together.

THE FINAL FULFILLMENT

READ REVELATION 19:6–9

8. Heaven is the last and greatest mountain! It is the new Mount Zion and the new Jerusalem with its new temple (Jesus). What does the Lord provide on this mountain? How are these provisions better than all that have come before? Who is present?

CONCLUSION

It is not difficult to understand why God chose mountains as places to connect with his people. Mountains draw our eyes up toward God and they inspire us with his majesty. What is truly amazing and humbling is that God desires to dwell with his people and provide for our every need. As sinners, we deserve nothing, and yet God in Christ Jesus provides everything. On his holy mountain, he even offers up his only-begotten son. By the blood of Jesus shed on Mount Calvary and sprinkled on Mount Zion, we are cleansed and set free from that which separates us from God. In other words, God has done and provided everything so he could dwell with us with the ultimate purpose that one day we will dwell with God on the new Mount Zion.

MIDWEEK OF LENT 3

THE WATER

INTRODUCTION

Water is an interesting, and sometimes strange, element. We all know we cannot live long without water. You can survive quite a while without food, but without water you are not long for the world. Water is needed to raise our crops and gardens and to keep alive our yards and plants. Drought is something that no one wants to go through, and in ancient times, drought brought famine and famine brought death. No water, no life. However, how often do we read about floods that devastate and destroy towns and crops? How often do we hear reports of people falling into a lake or river and drowning? As much as we need water to live, water can also bring about death. A strange element, indeed!

READ GENESIS 1:1–10

1. Note the role of water in the creation of the world. How would you describe this role?

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

READ GENESIS 6:5–22

2. After the fall into sin, the world and everyone in it suffered the consequences. In the days of Noah, it reached a terrible peak. How is this condition described in chapter 6? What is God's plan to deal with it? How is water being used?

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

READ 2 KINGS 5:1–14

3. Leprosy was incurable, and when one contracted it they were considered as good as dead. How is water used in this account of Naaman the leper? What do the waters of the Jordan do for Naaman? Read again verse 14. How is this language familiar to us?

READ 1 PETER 3:18–22

4. When Peter writes concerning the flood, how is his focus different? What does he say that corresponds to this?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

READ EXODUS 14:13–31

4. What is the dual purpose of water in this account? What is it that distinguishes who lives and who dies? Who is the actor in this salvation account? What New Testament act does this bring to mind?

READ JONAH 1:17–2:10

6. This is a familiar account, but how does God use water in the life of Jonah? How does Jonah view his time in the belly of the great fish? How long was he down in the waters? Why might this be significant?

ON TO THE LIFE OF CHRIST

The water motif is seen in the life of Christ in several ways but the two most important are Jesus' Baptism and Peter's attempt to walk on water.

READ MARK 1:9–13; MATTHEW 3:13–17

7. Why is Jesus baptized? What happens immediately after His Baptism? Where does He go and whom does He encounter?

READ MATTHEW 14:22–33

8. Why do you think Peter sinks down into the water? Who is the One who raises him up out of the water? How could this be seen as the Baptism of Peter?

READ COLOSSIANS 2:11–15

9. Note how Paul speaks of Baptism. Pay special attention to the dying and rising. How is this related to the language we read in Romans 6:1–4?

THE FINAL FULFILLMENT

READ EZEKIEL 47:1–12

10. This chapter is a portion of Ezekiel's vision of the new temple. What is it that brings life in this text? Where does it come from?

READ REVELATION 22:1-5

11. Where is this river of life flowing from? Note the similarities to Ezekiel's vision. Where do you think this new temple of Ezekiel is located?

CONCLUSION

Water can bring death or life, and in Baptism it brings both! The water motif of Scripture points us to the baptismal font and God's gracious act of salvation. Following this motif we see that it is God who does the work of salvation. Apart from Him we would sink down and be destroyed in these waters. However, He cleanses us and forgives all our sins and raises us up that we might dwell in the new temple of everlasting life with Him surrounded by the ever-flowing river of life.

MIDWEEK OF LENT 4

THE TREE

INTRODUCTION

Trees—without them life would not be the same. There would be none of the fruits we eat on a regular basis such as apples, oranges, pears, and cherries. No trees—no coconuts. What about shade when it is 90 degrees out? No trees, and it is harder to find shade. What was your house built out of? Where did all the wood come from? Trees. And, I am sure our children would miss the Christmas tree most of all.

Without trees, life would be different. All throughout the Bible, trees show up. Without trees in the Bible, life would also be different. Without the most important tree, we would be lost and helpless, without hope.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

READ GENESIS 2:7–9, 15–17; 3:1–7, 8–24

1. There were two specific trees mentioned in the Garden of Eden. What was the significance of each tree?
2. What is it that separates us from our God?
3. In Genesis 3:22–24, God expels Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. He makes them leave their home. Why?

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

God does not desire us to be eternally separated from Him, so He made a promise to save us from our sin, to make it as if we had never sinned (justification).

REREAD GENESIS 3:14–19

4. What are the consequences of this event in the Garden of Eden for the devil, for Eve, and for Adam? Who is the Offspring, the Seed, who will crush the serpent's head?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

As Genesis 3:15 shows, the solution to the fall is for God to rescue His people from sin, death, and Satan by sending a Savior who will give access to the “new” tree of life, Jesus Christ. God chooses to rescue His people by means of a tree. This is foreshadowed in the Old Testament many times. Moses' life has some examples of God rescuing His people using trees.

READ EXODUS 3–4; 14:15–16; NUMBERS 21:4–9

5. What is the “tree” in each of these accounts? How does God rescue His people using these “trees”? How do these accounts point to God rescuing you and me?

ON TO THE LIFE OF CHRIST

READ LUKE 23:26–56

Genesis 3:15 points straight to the Gospel where we see Christ crucified on our behalf even though we did not do anything to deserve such a rescue.

5. What is the tree in the account from Luke 23? Read John 3:14–15. How is the tree used to rescue God's people? How is it connected to the serpent pole of Moses? What/who is the fruit of this tree from which God's people eat and are given life?

READ LUKE 24:1–12

6. What is the message of the two men? How does this transform the cross? Hint: From a cruel instrument of death to . . .

READ 1 PETER 2:24

7. While we still dwell on this earth, Christ crucified on the cross becomes our life-giving sustenance. How do we receive the fruits of this tree of life?

THE FINAL FULFILLMENT

Jump past the ascension, past Pentecost, past the formation of the Early Church, past all of the Epistles, and land in the last book and the last chapter of the Bible to see the fulfillment of the tree motif. Once again, as in the beginning, we see the Tree of Life.

READ REVELATION 22:1–5

8. What tree is NOT in paradise? Why not? What tree is there? Why?

CONCLUSION

In closing, read the words of Pastor Stephen Starke's contemporary hymn "The Tree of Life:"

The tree of life with ev'ry good, in Eden's holy orchard stood,
And of its fruit so pure and sweet God let the man and woman eat.
Yet in this garden also grew another tree, of which they knew;
Its lovely limbs with fruit adorned against whose eating God had warned.

The stillness of that sacred grove was broken, as the serpent strove
With tempting voice Eve to beguile and Adam too by sin defile.
O day of sadness when the breath of fear and darkness, doubt and death,
Its awful poison first displayed within the world so newly made.

What mercy God showed to our race, a plan of rescue by His grace:
In sending One from woman's seed, the One to fill our greatest need—
For on a tree uplifted high His only Son for sin would die,
Would drink the cup of scorn and dread to crush the ancient serpent's head!

MIDWEEK OF LENT 5

THE LORD PROVIDES

INTRODUCTION

We say it all the time, “The Lord will provide.” But what is this statement based upon? How do we know this to be true? We respond to such an inquiry with, “By faith!” While always a good answer, what is this faith focused on? History? Track record? Hope? Desperate need? Perhaps all of the above, but what promise is it based upon? God does promise to provide, and we confess belief in this promise when we recite the meaning to the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed: “I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. . . .”

Our God is not only our Creator, but He is also our Sustainer, Keeper, and Provider. This is most certainly true, and we observe it all through the pages of Scripture.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

READ GENESIS 3:8–13; 4:8–16; 11:1–9

1. What are the basic, similar themes that run through these accounts? Who is attempting to be the provider? How does it work out?

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

In the beginning, God places man in the Garden of Eden where everything is provided for them. With the fall into sin, man will toil and struggle to survive. However, God promises that He will continue to sustain and provide for man.

READ GENESIS 3:15; 22:8–14

2. What is God promising to provide in these two accounts?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

3. To best understand how God provides for physical needs to prepare for His spiritual provision, we look more closely at the wilderness wanderings of the people of Israel. What is your definition of “wilderness”?

READ EXODUS 16:1–16; 17:1–7

4. What are the Israelites complaining about in these accounts? How does the Lord respond? Why is it important for God to provide for His people in this manner?

SKIM THROUGH EXODUS 19–31

5. What does the Lord provide for the people from the Mountain of Sinai? Why are each of these things important? How will they help them in the land of Canaan?

6. Moses was on the mountain with God for forty days. This is an important part of the motif of the Lord provides. Where else do we encounter the number forty in the Bible? What do all of these events and accounts have in common?

READ DEUTERONOMY 6:10–15

7. The people of Israel are preparing to enter the Promised Land after forty years of repenting, wandering, and preparation. How is this Promised Land described? What stands out in the description?

ON TO THE LIFE OF CHRIST

READ ISAIAH 7:14; ISAIAH 25

8. What is God providing for His people in each account? How is what God is providing different in each case? How are they the same?

READ JOHN 1:14–18

9. The Word became flesh to dwell among us. How does this show God's mercy, grace, and provision? What do we receive as a result? How have we deserved or earned these gifts?

READ MATTHEW 4:1–4

10. Once again the number forty appears. How is this a time of preparation for Jesus? Do you note any similarities to the forty years of manna?

THE FINAL FULFILLMENT

READ ACTS 1:3

11. After Jesus suffered, died, and rose on the third day, He presented Himself to the apostles for a period of forty days. After this He ascended into heaven. How was this time of forty days a time of preparation? What were the apostles and the Church provided as a result?

READ REVELATION 19:6–9

12. What Old Testament passage previously read does this bring to mind? What has the Lord provided His people? How does this connect to the Garden of Eden? (See Revelation 22.)

CONCLUSION

The Lord provides motif connects us to the promise from God that He will never forsake nor desert His people in their need. We can be confident that He will continue to provide for His people because He desires that we will be prepared to enter into the promised land of everlasting life in heaven above.

EASTER:

RETURN FROM EXILE

INTRODUCTION

It seems that people are always returning. Not as in the returning of purchases to the store, but as in returning themselves to a place they have left. We like to return home for the holidays, return to our roots, return to the country of our heritage, and return to the scene of the crime. We return because we feel a connection, a need to be there—as if it is where we belong.

In the Bible there are a lot of passages focusing on returning. The vast majority of them are focused on a return from one sort of exile or another. It is interesting that the exile is always from the same country and the return is always back to that same country—Israel, the Promised Land. This is the return from exile motif.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

READ GENESIS 3:22–23

1. This is the first great exile of Scripture. Adam and Eve are cast out of the Garden of Eden because of their disobedience. What all have they been exiled from?
2. Can man return to the garden? Why not?

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

READ GENESIS 3:15

3. Who is the promised offspring (or, seed) of the woman? Who can and will return man from their sin-imposed exile?

READ GENESIS 37:25–36

4. This is the first unplanned and unwanted exile from Canaan. Talk about how this came about. Remember that Jacob and Joseph's brothers eventually join him in Egypt because of the famine. What happens to them over the course of time?

READ EXODUS 3

5. After four hundred years of slavery—exile in a foreign land—God sends Moses to act as deliverer on His behalf. Read Genesis 50:22–25. What is Joseph's request? Why is this so important to him? Where does he want his bones to be taken?

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

5. The return from exile motif is best defined in the Old Testament by the exodus from Egypt and the return to the Promised Land of Canaan. This is not accidental. The greatest salvation event in the Old Testament is the exodus. What is the greatest salvation event in the New Testament? Read Deuteronomy 18:15. Who is the “prophet like Moses”?

6. List other exiles that take place in the Old Testament. In every case, why were the Israelites taken into exile? How did they manage to return to the Promised Land of Israel? Why was it necessary for the people to return to this small piece of ground?

ON TO THE LIFE OF CHRIST

8. Recite the words of the Apostles' Creed. What journey is taking place? (focus on the Second Article)

READ HOSEA 11:1

9. Who does God call out of Egypt?

READ MARK 15:33–39

10. Why was Jesus forsaken by His Father? For whose sake does He bear sin and die? What is accomplished by Jesus being separated—exiled—from God?

READ MARK 16:1–8

11. Why did the women go to the tomb? What did they expect to see? What did they find?

THE FINAL FULFILLMENT

READ REVELATION 7:9–14

12. What is being described in this text? Who are these people? Where are they? How is this the fulfillment of the return from exile motif?

CONCLUSION

Christ Jesus on the cross of Calvary has made heaven our home once again. Because He has removed the dividing wall of hostility that stands between us and God, we are now restored to a beautiful relationship with our God—just as it was always intended to be. We have been returned from exile and will, one day, stand with all the saints in the courts of heaven giving thanks and praise to the One who has brought us home. Welcome home!