

CELL NOTES
For Pete Osborne's talk on 8 March 2009
NEW STORIES

Israel's defining story was the Exodus. God rescued them from 400 years of slavery in Egypt, and brought them to a land that was their own. The event was told and retold. It permeated everything they were and did – from the 10 commandments (Exodus 20:2), to their worship (Psalm 81:10), to the festivals – such as Passover.

In answer to the question 'who is God?' their answer was, 'the one who rescued us from Egypt'.

Each of us has a story (or stories) that define us. Events in our lives that have shaped us in different ways. Perhaps some things we'd rather forget, and others that make us smile whenever we remember them. We are who we are, in part, because of the events that have shaped us.

And in the midst of this our relationship with God has a story too. Perhaps events or circumstances that have inspired us, people who have encouraged us, encounters with God that have shaped us, difficulties and suffering that have refined us.

These events leave a mark on us (as did Jacob's encounter with God – Gen 32:22-32).

We also as a church have stories that define us; events that have shaped us and have left their mark.

If Israel's answer to the question 'who is God?', was 'the one who rescued us from Egypt', what would our answer be?

Over time, Israel 'forgot' something of their story, of what God had done, and chose to walk away from Him. In the book of Jeremiah, God repeatedly calls Israel to turn back to him, and warns them of what will happen if they don't. Ultimately they failed to listen, they were invaded by the Babylonians, and many of them taken into exile. Yet in the midst of these warnings, are shoots of hope, of new life:

In **Jeremiah 16:14-15**, God promises to give Israel a new story. He does not reject the past ones, but speaks of a time when they will tell new stories of what God has done.

Does God want to give us, as BCF, a new story? Not to reject what has gone before, but to open a new chapter in our relationship with Him?

Some questions to consider:

Will we embrace the journey in the hope of new stories?

Stories come from experience. Will we choose to participate in the journey with our eyes open, looking for the new stories God wants to give us?

Who is God calling us to be?

It's important to think about where we are going and what might happen. Yet, to do certain things you need to be a certain kind of person. Who is God calling us to be as people?

How will I change?

Structure alone does not cause transformation. It can bring new opportunities and new focus, but it is us who must change. How am I embodying the values I want to have? How am I working out the elements of worship, mission and community in my life?