

GROWTH GROUPS
WEEK 8
WEEK OF AUGUST 2



Growth Group Summer 2020
Peace, Prosperity and Prayer
Week 8 – August 2, 2020 - Jeremiah 29:1-9

Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at a church. In this time of Corona19 and “social distancing” please don’t meet in person, but do continue to check in with each other. If your growth group would like to meet online or if you are aware of needs that the church can help fill, please let us know at connect@ljpres.org. Thank you for loving and caring for each other.

Setting the Context

Over the next two weeks we are going to be looking at Jeremiah 29:1-14. This is part of a letter that Jeremiah wrote to a group of people who were exiled from Jerusalem around 597 BC by the Babylonians.

The Babylonians were very strategic about the first group of people they removed. They chose leaders and court officials and the families of prophets and priests. In other words, they chose people of great influence. For some reason, Jeremiah was not included in this group. This was the beginning of the exile that would not reach its culmination until 587 BC when Babylon destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the temple.

Jeremiah writes this letter to remind the first group of exiles that they were not coming back to Jerusalem anytime soon. The false prophets kept telling them (see Jeremiah 29:15-19) that they would go home soon, but Jeremiah knew better. He writes to warn them, but also in order to give them some hope that one day, they would return.

It is interesting that in verse four we are told that God carried the people of Judah into exile. We normally think of the Babylonians as being the ones who did this, but God makes it clear that he is sovereignly involved in all things that happen in this world. God allowed them to be carried away, but God will also use this situation for His purposes.

Thus, Jeremiah tells the exiles to settle down. They are to work for the peace and prosperity of their new home. They are to pray that the city of their enemy prospers. These must have been very strange words for the Jews to hear. They knew what it was to pray for the city of Jerusalem (see Psalm 122: 6-9), but it would have been very troubling to think that they were to pray for their enemies’ welfare. This reminds us of Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:44 to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

The false prophets continued to tell the people that everything was going to be okay and God continued to counter by saying that this exile was going to last for a generation. The false prophets simply could not believe that God would allow his people to have to settle in a place that was not their home.



Exploring the Text

Read Jeremiah 29:1-9

¹ This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. ² (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) ³ He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said:

⁴ This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷ Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” ⁸ Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. ⁹ They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,” declares the Lord.

Questions

If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.

- 1) Can you remember the last time you hand-wrote a letter?
- 2) Jeremiah sends a letter to those in exile. How do you think the people responded to what he wrote, since he was not amongst them when he wrote it?
- 3) Share about a time in your own life when you felt as though you were living in exile? What was going on? Were you far from home, or perhaps at home?
- 4) What are some practical ways you can seek the “shalom” or peace and prosperity of the community where you live?
- 5) Why does Jeremiah call the people to build a new life, instead of lamenting their misfortunes? How do you make sense of God saying to settle in amongst the pagan Babylonians?
- 6) God promised the people of Judah that their exile would last 70 years. It is one thing to be given a timeline by God, but how do we trust God when we do not have a certain timeline?
- 7) The people of Judah had been used to gathering in the temple for worship and for their sacrifices, but now that was taken away from them. They had been led away from home. They could no longer gather as they once had because they had now been scattered. Pastor Paul mentioned the idea of being gathered and scattered when it comes to our faith. How have you seen that to be true?
- 8) Verse 7 tells us to pray for our city. Spend some time talking about specific ways we can be praying for our city.