



LC STUDY GUIDE

For the Good of the World

The Passage: Jeremiah 29:1-7

May 7 – May 27

Introduction:

Welcome to our new series, For the Good of the World. Generally, Christ-followers believe that Christianity is good for the world. Throughout our church history, we find examples of atrocities committed in Jesus' name and we also find examples of the Church being an amazing blessing (like in the story of William Wilberforce and slavery, it's the Church that leads the charge against its past atrocity).

We often think of contributing good in our modern Anglo-Western context. Though losing cultural influence, the Church is still capable of doing much good (and we should also remember that the Global South Church is growing in influence, particularly in South America, Africa, and parts of Asia). Today, we'll take a look at doing good in the midst of exile. In examining Israel's exile, we want to see what we can learn from it and how we might apply those lessons today.

Transition to our text:

When we look at this chapter of Jeremiah, we often focus on the 11th verse. "For I know the plans I have for you ..." We have seen it on magnets, t-shirts and graduation cards 😊 But tonight, we're talking about the verses that precede it.

Israel has been defeated by King Nebuchadnezzar who is described as an instrument of God's judgment for Israel's disobedience. Many have been killed, many have been left in the ruins of Israel, and many of the young and talented and have been taken into exile to live in Babylon. It's in this context that Jeremiah is writing from Jerusalem to the Israelis in exile.

Jeremiah 29:1-7

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."

O – In exile, what instructions does God give the Israelites as they live in Babylon?

I – Why do you think God instructed the Israelites to do these things?

A – Which of these would have been the hardest for you?

I – Unlike the captivity in Egypt, the Israelites were not enslaved in Babylon. What distinctives does this create?

(Unlike the Egyptian enslavement, the Israelites exiles in Babylon could live, flourish, and seek the good of their city. They could work, own property and businesses, marry, etc. They could even worship Yahweh. In Egypt, they had no legal rights as slaves, could not own property, their marriages were not recognized beyond their Jewish community, and they had to give homage to Pharaoh.)

A – What do we learn about God and His vision of goodness from His instructions to the Israelites?

A – For sake of metaphor, there are different forms of “exile.” We may have experienced exiles in certain relationship circles, perhaps in our careers, perhaps spiritually. Many of us feel like exiles as Christian resident aliens living in society. To make it personal, what has exile looked like in your life and what are you learning from this experience?

**** For groups interested in this “rabbit trail”:

As mentioned in the introduction, verse 29:11 is routinely quoted out of context:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Not only are the preceding verses needed in appreciating the context but so is the prior chapter. Jeremiah is responding to the false prophet Hananiah in both chapters, 28 and 29. If you have time and are up for the chase, read chapter 28 and contrast it with what Jeremiah has said to the exiled children of Israel.

- a. Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single meeting. Take some time to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best. Select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your Life Community group.
- b. Complement these questions with “process questions” (what else? what more? what do others think?)
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don’t rush people but encourage participation. Avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Application: Pace the study to conclude with difference-making application.
- e. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into “teaching” rather than facilitating, causing people to feel distracted or de-powered.