



Sermon-Based Study Guide  
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Jeremiah 29 | April 15, 2018

Prepared by Rev. Curtis A. Bronzan  
curtis@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x115

I. Introduction to this Study

We continue our series *Next Door as it is in Heaven*, in which we are taking seriously Jesus' teaching, to 'love our neighbor as ourselves.' After introducing this series last week with the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10.25-37), this study examines our call to be "in the world, but not of it" (Romans 12.1-2).

II. Connecting with One Another

What do you like most about your neighborhood?

What bothers you the most?

III. Study the Text

a. Read Jeremiah 29.1-3.

In a way, this chapter could be read as "a tale of two cities." But instead of London and Paris (as in the Charles Dickens novel), this tale of two cities includes Jerusalem and Babylon.

Who remains in the Holy City and who has been "carried into exile" by Nebuchadnezzar? How would you characterize the people who have been taken into captivity? What types of people would this include today?

Why would Nebuchadnezzar single these folks out? How do you think these exiles felt about being in Babylon?

Have you ever been forced to move somewhere or work in an area you didn't want to? How did it feel?

b. Read Jeremiah 29.4-6.

In verse 1 it's Nebuchadnezzar who carries the exiles into captivity. But in verse 4 (as well as 7 and 14), God declares that he displaced his people in Babylon. Why would God purposely exile his people in Babylon?

How do you reconcile this seeming contradiction? Can God use nonbelievers – even wicked Babylonian kings! – to fulfill his purposes?

Where have you seen others used by God even if they didn't know he was doing so? How have these people impacted your life?

c. In bringing the leaders, court officials, skilled workers, and artisans to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar hopes that they will move into the city and lose their spiritual identity, becoming full fledged Babylonians (he knows you can try to get rid of people three ways: expulsion, subjugation, or assimilation – but only assimilation

works). In Jeremiah 28, however, the prophet Hananiah encouraged the opposite: stay outside of Babylon and fight against it (he even declares that Babylon would fall in two years – see verses 3 and 11).

How are you tempted to assimilate into the worldly ways of our culture? How are you tempted to fight against our culture?

- d. Look again at verses 4-6. What is the third way decreed by God?

Romans 12.1-2 similarly instructs us to be “in the world, but not of the world.” Being in the world is a kind of exile, for our true citizenship is in heaven. But with the thought of defeating the Babylonians in two years still fresh in their minds, how do you think the Israelites received Jeremiah’s instruction to settle down? Would that bring them hope or not?

How are Christians “in exile” in 21st century America? How should we live distinctively? How distinctive are you in your neighborhood? Do neighbors know you are a Christian? If so, how?

- e. The instruction to “build and plant” in chapter 29 echoes Jeremiah’s call to prophetic ministry in 1.10. How could the exiles be used by God to change Babylonian culture?

- f. Read Jeremiah 29.7-14.

What do you think “prosper” means in this context? What is the relationship between the prosperity of Babylon and the prosperity of God’s people?

- g. In his book *To Change the World*, James Davidson Hunter writes, “For Jeremiah, exile did not mean that God had abandoned Israel. Rather, exile was the place where God was at work. God’s purposes with Israel, in other words, were served by the Babylonian invasion.”

How does this transform your understanding of Jesus “tabernacling with us” described in John 1? How does it transform the parts of our world you don’t like? How does it transform how you see your neighborhood and your role in it?

#### IV. Pray

- a. Ask God to reveal the ways you can live more distinctively in your everyday interactions with others,
- b. Pray for an opportunity to get to know your neighbors better,
- c. Lift up your neighborhood, that it would prosper in God’s will.

#### V. Digging Deeper

- a. Jeremiah’s letter in chapter 29 is written to those taken into captivity in 597 BC, during the reign of Jehoiachin. Further captivity occurred eleven years later. See 2nd Kings 24.10-16, then 2nd Kings 25.1-7, for description of these events.
- b. God’s use of Nebuchadnezzar to fulfill his plan is not the only time he used unbelieving pagans. Other examples include Cyrus (see 2nd Chronicles 36, Ezra 1, and Isaiah 45), Artaxerxes (see Ezra 4 and 7), and Darius (Ezra 6 and Daniel 6).