

# HOME IN EXILE

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## OPENING COMMENT

Jeremiah sends a letter to those who find themselves in the worst imaginable situation. Ripped from their family, their culture, and their God the Israelites would have been asking some fairly significant questions about how they should live in this new reality. Is it even worth continuing? Should we just embrace the new cultural norms? Should we despair that God has left us? Each question was, as still is, relevant for anyone who strives to follow God and live in a culture bent away from Him.

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## READ THE TEXT: Jeremiah 29:1-14

These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. <sup>2</sup>This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers had departed from Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. It said: <sup>4</sup>“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup>Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. <sup>6</sup>Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. <sup>7</sup>But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. <sup>8</sup>For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, <sup>9</sup>for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the Lord.

<sup>10</sup>“For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. <sup>11</sup>For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. <sup>12</sup>Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I



will hear you. <sup>13</sup>You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup>I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

## UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. Who is Jeremiah addressing in this portion of the text? What should be remembered about their condition as we read the rest of what Jeremiah has to say?
2. Who sent the people into exile? (vs. 4)
3. What is the disposition Israel is supposed to have about their circumstances in Israel? (vs. 5-6)
4. How should Israel think and act toward the foreign city they find themselves in? (vs. 7)
5. Based on the instructions found in verses 5-7, what message can we infer the “prophets” in verse 8-9 were espousing?
6. Who will bring back the Israelites from Babylon? What does this say about God and his timing? (vs. 10)
7. Verse 11 is a very popular verse, and can be removed from its context. What is the welfare, future, and hope Jeremiah talks about? (vs. 12-14)

## APPLYING THE TEXT

1. Many of the New Testament epistles refer to Christians as exiles, placing us in the same camp as the Israelites in Babylon. Do you resonate with that designation? Why or why not?
2. Jeremiah’s encouragement to the Israelites is to continue living life as designed by God, even as exiles in a foreign land. How does this play out today as we live as exiles in our homes?
3. How should Jeremiah’s instructions to the Israelites about the city of Babylon inform our attitudes towards the culture around us?
4. How do verses 11-14 help us accomplish the task of living regular lives oriented towards the welfare of the culture around us?
5. What is your disposition towards our status as Christians, our cultural moment, and the future that awaits? How accurately does this reflect the instruction we find here in our passage?



## BIBLICAL THREAD

1. Genesis 15 – God’s covenant with Abraham has the people living as “Sojourners” in the land of Egypt, which is part of God’s promise to Abraham.
2. Daniel 1, 3, 6 – Stories from the front lines of Babylon on how to live in the city but not like the city.
3. Matthew 10:16-25 – Jesus warns his disciples of what it is expected as a follower.
4. Romans 13:1-7 – Submission to the government over us.
5. James 1:1 – James refers to the church as the “dispersion” or exiles.
6. 1 Peter 1:1-2 – Peter writes a letter to the exiles chosen by God.
7. 1 John 1:15 – 17 – our love should be directed toward God, not towards the things of this world.
8. Revelation 19-21 – a future and hope worth living for.

## CONCLUSION

Jeremiah’s conviction is that God is faithful to His promises and will deliver the Israelites from their suffering. Instead of despair or disengagement, this should spur the Israelites to continue living faithful lives oriented toward the welfare of their neighbors and surrounding culture. It is having a firm grasp on the future hope we share that will fuel our efforts to live faithfully to God’s word and yet not despise or separate ourselves from our neighbors. In fact, it is because of this hope that we can joyfully engage in the welfare of our neighborhoods, knowing that God has placed us here and will keep us to the end.

## SHARE & PRAY

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### LIFE GROUP VISION:

The goal to meeting together around the word of God is three-fold. First, we want to more clearly understand what God is saying to us through his Word and apply it to our own hearts and minds. Secondly, we want to build a loving community with each other to disciple one another toward maturity in Christ. Thirdly, we desire each of us, as ambassadors of Christ, to look outwards to our community and ask how we can bring the truth of the gospel to bear on those whom God has placed in our lives.

