

The Year of Discipleship in 3-D

(Further Developing Devoted Followers of Christ)



Welcome! Growing into more fully-devoted followers of Christ, may this time help all: **Grow Upward** into a more mature personal relationship and commitment to Christ Jesus faithful to God's Word!

Grow Outward to neighbor and world around, learning how to love well and to lead in what matters to God - guided by God's Word, by Jesus Himself, and by the Holy Spirit!

And, **Grow Inward** to discover a more contemplative faith, enhanced by both silence and prayer!

The Scripture for Sunday, November 28, 2021

[STUDY LESSON 12]

THE OLD TESTAMENT READING:

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-14

{1} These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

{4} Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: {5} Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. {6} 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. {7} 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. {8} For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, {9} for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the LORD.

{10} For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. {11} For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. {12} Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. {13} When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, {14} I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

DISCUSSION GUIDANCE AND QUESTIONS:

For an overview of Jeremiah consider watching: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/jeremiah/>

For an overview of "The Exile" theme consider watching: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/exile/>

1. Open *(or have someone in the group open)* with a prayer inviting the work of the Holy Spirit to open up the hearts and lives of any and all to shape believers into more fully devoted following of Christ.
2. Read *(or have one or more persons read)* the passage printed above *(or from a bible)*.
3. BACKGROUND NOTES: Jeremiah, as a writing is found among the Major Prophets (those of greatest length), is notably, the longest (by word count) book of the Bible. A prophet to the remaining kingdom (the Southern Kingdom of Judah), his prophecy is often dated prior to and during the period known as the Babylonian Exile. The exile and return are essentially the final major events in Old Testament history. The initial siege of Jerusalem was 597 B.C. A decade later, the city and Temple were both destroyed by the Babylonians and Judeans either fled to Egypt or were exiled to Babylon for 40 years. Jeremiah was among those in Egypt having been taken there for fear of reprisals from the Babylonians.

4. What words or phrases caught your attention as you heard this passage read? Take note within what sort of feelings arise from within you.
5. Few of us, if any, may personally know the peril of having home, Temple, city and nation destroyed by a foreign invader followed only by forced exile to that foreign country or fearful flight to a “safe” foreign country in the opposite direction. What might have been going through the hearts and minds of the exiled or fleeing Judeans?
 - a. “What did we do to deserve this?”
 - b. “Where is our God in all this?”
 - c. “Will we ever get to go home?”
 - d. “Will we ever survive this?”
 - e. “The wrath of God has been visited upon us.”
 - f. “Our Temple and our God are no more. We are doomed.”
 - g. Other...
6. Much judgment is declared throughout this book and most is directed at God’s people and leaders. By the time of our text (*Jeremiah 29*) the people are already in exile. Imagine, were God to examine us as a nation today, where might God find reason for judgment?
7. Do you sense the Lord calling, through Jeremiah, for the people to settle in to their “state of affairs” in Babylon with instructions to build homes, plant gardens, marry, have children, etc... (*Jeremiah 29:5-6*)? How might such directives be interpreted beyond, simply, the longevity of their exile?
8. Can you recall a time in life where, though trying, painful and unsettling, God was commanding you to just “grin and bear” it? What was that period like for you? How did you feel going through it?
9. Though captors, the Lord God seems to be instructing the exiled Israelites to “bless” the Babylonians through seeking their welfare and praying for them (*Jeremiah 29:7*). Is there any way for you to draw a parallel with such an “ask” on God’s part?
10. Where have you experienced being led astray or receive ill-advised counsel by leaders, particularly religious leaders (*Jeremiah 29:8-9*)? What did you learn from the deception? How did it shape you?
11. Initially, some were exiled around 605 B.C., and King Cyrus of Persia defeated the Babylonians in 539 B.C. Not all returned, but essentially the length was that of a lifetime (*70 years - see Jeremiah 29:10*). Patience was certainly needed for such an extended “stay.” How well do you live patience?
12. The exile cannot be equated with slavery, but the circumstances had to be somewhat bleak. In the midst of such a state came words of incredible hope (*Jeremiah 29:10b-14*). How might those words have been received internally by the exiled Israelites? What words/phrases therein do you find most hopeful? Why?
13. Following (or discipleship) obviously implies some element of hopeful-endurance. What are some of your discipleship “take-aways” from this text?
14. Can you identify any particular ways your Christian faith and following might be inspired to change in light of this passage from Jeremiah (and any discussion and/or reflection that may have taken place)?
15. (*Optional*) Read the passage once more. Then, take some time to close (or have someone close) with a prayer.