

Letters to the Exiles

Jeremiah 25 and 29 (with 28)

WHAT WE FOUND

Two prophets, two timelines. Hananiah promised the exile would end in two years; Jeremiah said seventy (28:2-4; 25:11). The kinder-sounding message was the dangerous one: a two-year story requires nothing but packed bags and a life on hold, and false hope paralyzes. Then came the letter to Babylon, and its commands were the last thing exiles wanted to hear: build houses, plant gardens, marry, raise children, multiply (29:5-6). Many readers hear Eden's fruitfulness mandate echoing in enemy territory. Exile does not suspend vocation; it relocates it. And the quiet theology of verse 7: Babylon thinks it deported them; God says "where I have sent you."

The letter's boldest line asked victims to seek the *shalom* of their conquerors' city and pray for it, "for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (29:7). And we recovered the real 29:11: addressed to exiles, set on a seventy-year horizon (29:10), a promise reaching past many of its adult hearers' lifetimes, and stronger for it. God's good purposes are certain, and they run through Babylon, not around it. And the invitation Christians may truly receive as their own: "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart" (29:13), spoken first to the exiles, extended in Christ to all who seek.

Then two discoveries. Daniel, decades later in Babylon, perceiving "in the books" the seventy years God had spoken through Jeremiah and turning the foretold span into prayer (Daniel 9:2-3): one book of the Bible reading another. And St. Peter handing the letter to the Church, addressing Christians as "aliens and exiles" whose visible good conduct makes the Gentiles glorify God (1 Peter 2:11-12). The strategy is twenty-six centuries old and unchanged: build, plant, bless, pray, and let the neighbors notice.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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The Letter to Diognetus · *Anonymous, second century*

One of the earliest descriptions of Christians says they dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners: every foreign land is to them a fatherland, and every fatherland a foreign land. Rooted enough to bless the city, detached enough to belong to God.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *The City of God, Book XIX*

St. Augustine taught that the City of God, on pilgrimage through history, makes use of the earthly peace and even contributes to it, citing this very letter: the captives were told to pray for Babylon,

because in its peace was their peace.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ignatius of Loyola · *A summary formula of his spirituality, handed down by his companions*

St. Ignatius formed his companions to seek and find God in all things: the classroom, the kitchen, the marketplace. If God can be found in Babylon, then no posting, no job, and no season of waiting is spiritually wasted time.

Live It This Week

- Do one deliberate act of shalom-seeking in your Babylon this week: solve a problem that is not yours, honor someone unhonored, or improve something you could have just endured.
- Pray for your city, campus, or workplace by name every day this week, including one person there who makes it feel like exile.
- Write “sent, not stuck” somewhere you will see it on Monday morning, and read Jeremiah 29:12-13 before you walk in the door.

Memory Verse

"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." (Jeremiah 29:7, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Jeremiah 30-31.

Catechism References

CCC 2239 · CCC 1049