

## **MAKING THE BEST OF IT** **Jeremiah 29.1-14**

November 12, 2006

Exile is traumatic and terrifying. Our sense of who we are is very much determined by the place we are in and the people we are with. When that changes, violently and abruptly, who are we? The accustomed ways we have of finding our worth and sensing our significance, vanish. The first wave of emotion recedes and leaves us feeling worthless; meaningless. We don't fit anywhere.

There were a series of deportations to Babylon during the ministry of Jeremiah.

605 B.C. (Daniel 1.1-7, 8); 597 B.C. (Jeremiah 24.1-10; 29.1-2); 587/6 B.C. (Jer. 39.1-10)

Israel's exile was a violent and extreme form of what all of us experience from time to time.

There are times where this experience of exile will be part of our experience. It is at these times, where this very strangeness can open up new reality to us. An accident, a tragedy, or a disaster of any kind can force the realization that the world is not predictable, and that reality is far more extensive than our habitual perception of it. With the pain and in the midst of alienation, a sense of freedom can occur.

### **False Dreams**

The letter that Jeremiah writes to the exiles in chapter 29 was written somewhere between 597 and 586 B.C. During this period, there were false prophets telling lies to the people in exile.

#### **Jeremiah 29.15-23**

The religious leaders with them nurtured their self-pity. These prophets called attention to the unfairness of their plight and stirred the pots of discontent. These prophets described dreams, God-given they claimed, that revealed that the exile would end soon.

### **A Letter from Jeremiah**

One day, two men from Jerusalem appeared unannounced among the exiles: Elasah and Gemariah. They had come on official business carrying a message to the king of Babylon. On their way to the palace, they visited the community in exile. They had a message from Jeremiah; a letter to the exiles.

#### **Jeremiah 29.1-14**

What the letter does, is give instruction and hope to those in exile.

### **Living at Our Best**

*“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 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. 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.”*  
Jeremiah 29.5-7

### **Invitation and Promise**

So much for the rebuke and counsel in Jeremiah's letter to the exiles. There is also invitation and promise in it, and this is what finally came to the center and shaped the exile experience.

*“This is what the LORD says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. 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. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the LORD, ‘and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,’ declares the LORD, ‘and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.’”* Jeremiah 29.10-14

#### **Jeremiah 30.1-33.26**

#### **Hebrews 8.1-13**