

Sermon-Based Small Group Bible Study

Join the Journey: Seeking Shalom (Jeremiah 29:1–14)

Open

Select one of these “ice breakers” to get the conversation going toward the study.

- When you were twelve, how long was “a long time” to you? What is “a long time” now?
- Did you ever move to a different community as a child? What was that like? If you’ve moved as an adult, what was that like?
- Some people like to go on adventures, and some like to stay at home. Which are you? When you’re away from home, how long is it before you’re ready to go back home?

Dig

After reading Jeremiah 29:1–23 together, discuss these questions.

1. Jeremiah writes to some of his fellow residents of Jerusalem who have been forcibly removed from their home and taken far away to their captors’ city, Babylon. What feelings do you think those people had? What thoughts and feelings about their captors? about God? About the place to which they were taken? What would they have hoped for?
2. Look at what God tells Jeremiah to say to these exiles in verses 4–7. How is that different from what they might have expected? Does that message sound hopeful? Discouraging? Confusing? What does it tell us about what is important to God?
3. The false prophets of whom Jeremiah warns in this text were promising the exiles would soon return home. What would have made such a message appealing? Why do you think it was important that the exiles not listen to this message?
4. Verse 10 says that the exiles will return, but in 70 years. How do you think that message would sit with the exiles? How would it have challenged them?
5. In verse 11 God tells the exiles that his plans for them are good, for their benefit. Pastor Bryan pointed out that God tells the exiles “I sent you” (verses 7, 14, again in verse 20). How do you think those two ideas—good plans and sending people into exile after military conquest—go together? How does it inform what we understand of God’s “good” plans for his people?

Summary: Judah’s exile would last a lifetime. Few of the captives would see home again. But God tells them he is still at work in them. Waiting for God’s promised restoration, they are to bring God’s blessing in the very foreign, very hard place where they find themselves. In this they will show God’s goodness to their pagan captors and remind themselves of God’s blessing beyond their most obvious circumstances.

Reflect

Use any of these prompts to encourage group members to apply the text to their own experiences.

- In what ways is the life of a Christian in our world like the life of an exile in a pagan land? How does that help you understand your life and God’s “plan” for your good right now?

- Where have you seen Christians work for a measure of *shalom*, God's wholeness and peace, in their community? What effect did their actions have on you and others?
- As we seek to bring *shalom* where we are while waiting for God's full *shalom* yet to come, what do you see as the attitudes we need to cultivate, habits we need to develop, ideas we need to remember?

Pray

Invite the group to pray together using any of these suggestions.

- What needs have you heard from others in the group that we can pray about?
- Name a situation in which *shalom* is lacking, and let's pray for those we name.
- What help do you need from God to empower you to bring *shalom* in a situation in your life or the lives of those around you?