

EKKLESIA

"I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH"

Discussion Guide

April 22-23, 2023

"EKKLESIA" Week 2: "For The City"

(with answers)

GATHER

- Describe a time when you were really proud of how God's people contributed to the wellbeing of a city/community. What did they do and why did that matter? (This could be something you yourself were involved in!)
- If you were at a weekend service, share your takeaways from the message you heard. What was something the Holy Spirit highlighted for you?

GROW

This weekend's message was anchored in **Jeremiah 29:1-14** and **Psalms 137**.

Talk through these texts more thoroughly as a group using the outline below. *Feel free to select a suggested question or two in each section to guide your conversation.*

1. **Understand Their Story**

Read and discuss Jeremiah 29:1-14. This text gives both historical information and includes God's commands to them in that setting.

- Discuss what God's people were facing when these words were written.
 - Psalm 137 records what people were feeling during this period.
 - What attitude do God's people have in this Psalm and why do they have it?
They're weeping (137:1); they're remembering Zion (Jerusalem, 137:1); they're asking a question of lament (137:4); they're calling a 'curse' down on themselves if they forget the reason for their pain (137:5-6).

Why? They're in Babylon (137:1), being tormented by their captors (137:3).

What's the big deal about this? Israel was taken into captivity in Babylon. Throughout the Old Testament, the identity and worship of God's people was tied to the key events involving God's rescue from slavery in Egypt, guidance and provision through the wilderness, and then moving into and taking possession of the "promised land". To be uprooted from their home represented a significant shift out of the blessings of God and into the righteous judgment from God. Grief and distress characterize this experience of "exile" both physically (in terms of connection to their land) and spiritually (in terms of their proximity to the temple, and practices of worship).

- This is an “imprecatory Psalm”.¹ How does knowing the context help us understand the extreme language of 137:9?
These Psalms display a longing for God’s justice amidst the experience of oppression. There’s a rawness to them that is shaped by their experience of exile. They are not meant to display an inappropriate cruelty towards people created in the image of God.
- Are there parallels between Israel’s experience of “exile” and our experience of being Christians in our city/country/current culture?
 - What things grieve you about our city? Our country?
 - What things make it difficult to “sing the LORD’s song in a foreign land?” (Psalm 137:4)
- Despite their circumstances, what could they have seen about the character of God based on this text (especially 29:10-14, perhaps)?
The main thing here is to see the sovereignty of God. Nothing is outside of his control. Things were bad for God’s people and while it may have looked like they were under the control of the rulers of Babylon, the truth was that God’s good purposes would ultimately come to pass.

Notice what God is up to and what he’s saying: *he* sent them into captivity (29:4) - it wasn’t accidental; and also: he will visit them, fulfill his promise to bring them back (29:10) - nothing will prevent him from this. Additionally, he still desires their good (29:11), and they will be in a deeper relationship with him, and be rescued and restored (29:12-14).

Because of this, God is still worthy of their trust and their worship.

- Why is it hard for us to see who God is or recognize what God is doing amidst difficulty?
- Given their situation, how could some of God’s instructions (especially 29:5-7, perhaps) have felt?
 - What barriers to obedience do we encounter when in difficult situations?

2. **Connect To His Story**

God’s desire from the beginning (Gen. 12:1-3) has always been for his people to bless the world in any and every setting.

- Check out Philippians 2:14-16; and/or Titus 3:1-8. What ideas from these texts are parallels to what we see in Jeremiah 29? What is God’s vision for how the church interacts with the places it inhabits?

From Philippians 2: Resist complaining (2:14); display the different and better way of life in Jesus amidst a culture that lives differently (2:15); remain faithful to the word of God (2:16).
From Titus 3: submit to our rulers (3:1), speak evil of no one and gently show courtesy to all people (3:2); be devoted to the good activities that flow from your new identity (3:3-8).

Some examples of the parallels:

Notice, for example: how can we pray to the LORD on behalf of those we live amongst (Jer. 29:7) if we hate them, grumble against them, speak evil of them (as Philippians and Titus talk about)?

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/imprecatory-psalms.html>

Or, for example: we make the most of where we are (as in Jeremiah 29:4-6) as those who have the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:4-6) and have a different, counter-cultural (Phil. 2:5) disposition towards the earthly things given our heavenly hope (Tit. 3:7).

GO

3. Apply To Our Story

Northview aspires to make more and better disciples, leaders, and churches - regardless of the time we live in. Unto what end? Primarily: that God be glorified (as we saw last week), but also for the good of our city (as we saw this week). *Feel free to select a section or two to use in your group time.*

- Consider your posture towards the culture we live in.
 - Which biblical character are you most like in your personality and/or spiritual perspective?
 - Pharisee: Stand outside culture to critique it.
 - Sadducee: Live inside culture and compromise your beliefs.
 - Zealot: Live inside culture and radically fight for your beliefs.
 - Essene: Stand outside culture to escape it.
 - There is a better way than all 4 of these postures above: to be what Jesus calls “salt and light” (Matthew 5:13-16). “Good works open the door for good words.”
- How can you contribute to the wellbeing of the place you live in (Jeremiah 29:7)? Remember, the church is *you*. Not a building or organization.
 - What does it mean for Abbotsford or Mission (or wherever you live!) to “prosper”? (Are there ways it can flourish even if it does not mean every person becomes a fully devoted follower of Jesus?)
 - What works are you in a position to engage in? (The places where you already spend a lot of time might be a good place to start.)
- How can you pray on behalf of your city? (Jeremiah 29:7)
 - What are the agencies, organizations, leaders that you could intercede for as a group?
 - Who are those who don't currently follow Jesus that you could pray for by name?
 - (See also 1 Timothy 2:1-6, and/or view the bonus “Prayers For Work” resource² and use the prayers that apply to your group!)

²<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/633371cdcd899b3ab1d896e1/t/6413a3eccf667e3d77d2995d/1679008752217/Prayers%2Bfor%2BWork%2BPDF%2BStandard.pdf&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1682110535703937&usg=AOvVaw2p8dOcmH9uFVJzBnuPW0Qb>