

November 17, 2019

Jeremiah 29:1-14

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Book of Jeremiah is the second of the Prophets in the Christian Old Testament. Of all the prophets, Jeremiah comes through most clearly as a person, ruminating to his scribe Baruch about his role as a servant of God with little good news for his audience. His book is intended as a message to the Jews in exile in Babylon, explaining the disaster of exile as God's response to Israel's pagan worship: the people, says Jeremiah, are like an unfaithful wife and rebellious children, their infidelity and rebelliousness made judgement inevitable, although restoration and a new covenant are foreshadowed.

In 29 we read of a letter that Jeremiah writes from Jerusalem to the community of those exiled in Babylon warning them to not trust the false prophets who teach not to worry about things, that God's deliverance from the domination of Babylon (in 597 BCE) will soon be over. Jeremiah tells the people to settle in, to be hospitable to their neighbors, living a normal life as peaceable subjects of Babylon.

the words of the letter scholars believe this letter was sent – and thus this all occurred between the first invasion of Israel by Babylon in 597 BCE and the definitive defeat and massive deportation of people that happened in response to an Israelite rebellion in 587 & 583 BCE.

seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile It's remarkable that Jeremiah commands the Jews to pray for the hated heathen power that has defeated them. There is no other such teaching or word in all the literature of the period of the Babylonian Captivity. Scholars hear within this command the invitation to the exiles to have courage, to not be afraid, to live as a "light to the nations" (Isaiah 46:2 and 52:10) so that the Babylonians might discover the goodness of Yahweh and trust in the God of the Promised Land of homecoming and peace.

The Gospel of Matthew. The Jewish nature of Matthew's Gospel may suggest that it was written in the Holy Land, or Syrian Antioch. Since his Gospel was written in Greek, Matthew's readers were obviously Greek-speaking. They also seem to have been Jews. Many elements point to Jewish readership, yet the gospel maintains a universal outlook.

¹These 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. ²This was after King Jeconiah, and the queen mother, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the artisans, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem. ³The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom King Zedekiah of Judah sent to Babylon to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It said: ⁴Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶Take 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. ⁷But **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. ⁸For 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, ⁹for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the Lord.

¹⁰For 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. ¹¹For 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. ¹²Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, ¹⁴I 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.

Matthew 25:31-46

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

³¹ “When **the Son of Man** comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.

³² All **the nations** will be gathered before him, and *he will separate* people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a **stranger** and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰ And **the king** will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of **THE LEAST OF THESE** who are *members of my family*, you did it to me.’ ⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but **THE RIGHTEOUS** into eternal life.”

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- **What word, phrase or image grabs your attention?**
- **Both scriptures talk of how God is present when seemingly absent. How do you see God in the world?**
- **How do you struggle to trust God without seeing, what we might call “living in Exile”?**
- **What invitation to do you hear in this word about how to act, speak, be(come) or to live in our relationships?**

Matthew’s main purpose is to prove to his Jewish readers that Jesus is their Messiah. He does this primarily by showing how Jesus in his life and ministry fulfilled the OT Scriptures. www.biblica.com

the Son of Man, This title comes from the book of Daniel, indicating that the parable is an apocalyptic writing – a scene filled with metaphor and symbol, that reveals that the present injustice is not a permanent way of life.. God’s action will reverse it. This title is repeatedly attributed to Jesus of Nazareth in the gospel accounts, intentionally harkening back to this vision of Daniel.

[Then Daniel saw a vision] ¹³ “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”

the nations ἔθνος/ethnos/ The word can vary in meaning ranging from all the Gentile (or non-Jewish) peoples, to both the Gentiles and the Jews, and here seems to be a synonym of “the whole inhabited world.”

he will separate the image of separation as judgement is common in the gospel: wheat and chaff (Mt 3:12), weeds & wheat (Mt 13:24-30), fish (13:47-50, two men in a field, and two women grinding wheat (24:36-25:30)..

the king: the Son of Man is the ultimate King of all. The use of the word King also resounds throughout Matthew’s gospel. From the Gentile Magi who come from the East seeking “he who has been **born king** of the Jews” in 2:2; to Jesus as he’s welcomed to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, **your king is coming to you**, humble, and mounted on a donkey.” Matthew 21:5 all in contrast to King Herod and awaiting the mockery of Jesus in his passion as the king of the Jews (Mt 27: 11, 29, 37, 42)

THE LEAST OF THESE: this is an intensive form of the term “the little ones” used for the disciples who do God’s will as revealed by Jesus (5:47, 7:3-51 12:46-50; 18:15-21). Jesus is identified with this marginalized community in 10:40 when Jesus says: “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.”