**Living in Babylon or America, Pt 3**

**Jeremiah 29:5-7**

America is drifting farther and farther away from her Christian foundations. There has been a concerted effort to limit or even take away the freedoms that not only the church, but all people once enjoyed. Our constitution is being gutted at an alarming rate. Many people see that the Bible is outdated.

How are we to live as believers, as the church, in a hostile, ever increasing, pagan society? How do we stay positive and optimistic? How do we turn hopelessness into hope? How do we have a future living in a strange and ungodly land? Jeremiah 29:5-7 instructs us. (See also Jeremiah 24)

So, the first wave of exiles to Babylon, God will bless. He will transform them. He will bless them materially and spiritually. They will be His witnesses to the Babylonians. He will show them mercy and grace, to His glory and for His glory. This is how He will give His people a future and a hope. Sounds a little upside down.

The second wave of exiles will not fare well, since King Zedekiah refused to willingly subject himself to King Nebuchadnezzar, as God had commanded, but instead signed an alliance with Egypt to fight Babylon. God did not take kindly to that agreement. It was a sign of unbelief and trust in man and not God. As the leader goes, so goes the community.

So, there are four things about being optimistic during exile that we will consider today from Jeremiah: lay down roots in Babylon, live with the generations in view, seek the welfare of the Babylonians, and pray for the Babylonians.

**1. Lay down roots (V 5)** - Optimism lays down roots.

The exiles are going nowhere for 70-100 years. By laying down roots, they are establishing God and His ways, witnessing to the people of Babylon. They will give hope to a hopeless culture. This is counter intuitive with the exiles for they are tied to their homeland: to be blessed is to be at home; To be cursed is not to be home. God is turning this upside down. To do this they need to be good citizens. (Daniel)

God is doing nothing more than fulfilling Genesis 12:1-3.

Their stay will show the Babylonians that they believe God will do what he says they will do. They will show the Babylonians that God is faithful. The Lord will be glorified for this. He is a merciful and gracious God. He does not forget His children even when He chastises them. He cannot forget His own. This applies to us in America.

Caution: We must be careful that we do not isolate ourselves from society. Matthew 5:16

Be involved in the community; know your physical neighbors. Know the people with whom you work or do business. Let people will see your good deeds.

Caution: At the same time, we cannot be influenced to live in ungodly ways. We are in the world, but we are not of the world.

**2. Live with the generation in view (6)**

We make plans. We build for the future.

The exiles may not have believed what they were hearing. Their identity lied in the Promised Land; it was their home; there was the logical place to raise children. Why raise children in this detestable place?

God promised to bless them. They will grow both physically and spiritually. Raising a Godly family who knows God and knows My word will have a greater influence on the Babylonian culture, than the Babylonian culture will have on your family. They will see how well their families work, and the Babylonians will be intrigued.

Christian families have a huge influence on a culture. As Christian families multiply, so does their influence.

**3. Seek the welfare of the Babylonians (V 7)**

This command was utterly shocking to the exiles. They’re being commanded to seek the peace of the people that have destroyed their city and may have tortured or killed their loved ones. Yet God tells them to live in peace with them and to help them prosper.

It amazing what happens when you are kind and considerate and gracious toward those who don’t like you, especially if they do not like you for being a Christian. When people see that you are genuinely concerned about them, and not seeking to harm them, they will respond positively towards you.

Seeking peace and prosperity for the community in which you live shows that God and His people are optimistic and positive.

**4. Pray for the Babylonians (V 7)**

This is the only place in the Old Testament where the Jews are called to pray positively for unbelievers. They were commanded to pray for Babylon’s peace and prosperity. The Hebrew word is *Shalom.* It has this idea *of completeness and soundness and of a person's good welfare—that things should go well for them.* God is commanding them to pray that life goes well for the Babylonians.

You and I know that when we pray for unbelievers, we pray for their salvation. Have you ever thought, however, about praying for their peace and prosperity? Matthew 5:44

Pray for your enemies. Pray for the enemies of the faith. Pray for those who put policies into place that are that are detrimental to the faith and that are detrimental to people even though they think the policies are good. Pray for government officials on all levels.

Whether our society turns away from or turns towards peace, we will reap the benefits of those prayers. If we pray for the overall peace of the nation, or whatever community in which we live, we will enjoy the benefits of that as well.

So, lay down roots; live with the generations in view; seek peace and pray for the peace and prosperity of the village, city, county, state, and the nation.