

This week we hear from the prophet Jeremiah, who came after both Amos and Isaiah. By his day Israel and Judah are wiped out. Israel (the Northern Kingdom) is gone, conquered, vanquished and annexed by the Assyrians. Judah was then threatened and eventually conquered for having played the adversary sides against one another, siding first with Babylon then with Egypt in the hope of freedom. Now a conquered, vassal state, the majority of their elites (educated, wealthy, leaders both religious and political) have been deported to far away Babylon, exiled in order to purge the people of their Israelite culture (and religion) and make them into good Babylonian citizens. It was the Babylonian imperial way, a form of “culture-cide.”

**The letter:** Jeremiah resides in Judah (Jerusalem), in our section of the prophets testimony he talks of a letter of comfort and advice that he pens and sends to the exiles Judeans in far away Babylon. .

**the exiles:** In the late 7th century BCE, the Kingdom of Judah was a client state of the Assyrian empire. In the last decades of the century, Assyria was overthrown by Babylon, an Assyrian province. Egypt, fearing the sudden rise of the Neo-Babylonian empire, seized control of Assyrian territory up to the Euphrates river in Syria, but Babylon counter-attacked. In the process Josiah, the king of Judah, was killed in a battle with the Egyptians at the Battle of Megiddo (609 BCE).

After the defeat of Pharaoh Necho's army by the Babylonians at Carchemish in 605 BCE, Jehoiakim began paying tribute to Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. Some of the young nobility of Judah were taken to Babylon.

In the following years, the court of Jerusalem was divided into two parties, in support of Egypt and Babylon. After Nebuchadnezzar was defeated in battle in 601 BCE by Egypt, Judah revolted against Babylon, culminating in a three-month siege of Jerusalem beginning in late 598 BCE.[7] Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, died during the siege[8] and was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah) at the age of eighteen.[9] The city fell on 2 Adar (March 16) 597 BCE,[10] and Nebuchadnezzar pillaged Jerusalem and its Temple and took Jeconiah, his court and other prominent citizens (including the prophet Ezekiel) back to Babylon.[11] Jehoiakim's uncle Zedekiah was appointed king in his place, but the exiles in Babylon continued to consider Jeconiah as their Exilarch, or rightful ruler.

Despite warnings by Jeremiah and others of the pro-Babylonian party, Zedekiah revolted against Babylon and entered into an alliance with Pharaoh Hophra. Nebuchadnezzar returned, defeated the Egyptians, and again besieged Jerusalem, resulting in the city's destruction in 587 BCE. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city wall and the Temple, together with the houses of the most important citizens. Zedekiah and his sons were captured, the sons were executed in front of Zedekiah, who was then blinded and taken to Babylon with many others (Jer 52:10-11). Judah became a

## SCRIPTURES FOR

SUNDAY 11.26.2017

Jeremiah 29:1-14

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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

<sup>10</sup> For 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. <sup>11</sup> For 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. <sup>12</sup> Then when **you** call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear **you**. <sup>13</sup> When **you**

Babylon with many others (Jer 52:10–11). Judah became a Babylonian province, called Yehud, putting an end to the independent Kingdom of Judah. (Because of the missing years in the Jewish calendar, rabbinic sources place the date of the destruction of the First Temple at 3338 HC (423 BCE) or 3358 HC (403 BCE)).

**prophets and the diviners:** The previous chapter talks of the battle between Jeremiah and Hananiah (a false Prophet). It's referred to in verses 8 and 9. Hananiah is false because he tells the people that they should resist Babylon, to not "settle in" to their new home, that God will deliver them in what we might call a Hollywood ending to the national defeat. Jeremiah says something different. He tells the people to put down roots, to settle in for a long sojourn in exile (for many the entirety of their lives) as strangers in a strange land. The wise thing to do is to adapt, not give up or give in, but look to how God is present – even in seeming defeat – and working for good. They were considered false for told the people more of what they wanted to hear, than what God demanded.

**You/your:** Jeremiah 29:11 is an oft-quoted scripture, used to give hope in terms of looking at an uncertain future. We often forget the context into which it's spoken in this prophetic book (and intentional letter sent to exiled Jews in Babylon). One of the main ways in which it can be misinterpreted is in failing to recognize that all of the "**you**"s in the text are plural, as in "**all y'all**" (*like one might say in the South*). It's not a promise for a person, but rather one for a people.

Most scholarship asserts that the gospel of John is written after the other 3 gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Those three share common language and share most of the same stories, whereas John diverges, including some unique to John stories as well as a different timeline. The Greek of John is more advanced and of a higher level than the other gospels, it also contains more developed theological reflections, including specifically the prologue (John 1:1-18) which is written as a re-writing of the Genesis 1 account of God's creation. Today's selection is in John alone.

**Advocate:** παράκλητος (Greek) [paraklētōs] meaning (a) an advocate, intercessor, (b) a consoler, comforter, helper, (c) Paraclete. The word is a combination of two words: [pará] "from close-beside" and [kaléo]: "to make a call") – properly, a legal advocate who makes the right judgment-call because close enough to the situation. In the NT times the word paraklētōs ("advocate, advisor-helper") is the regular term of an attorney (lawyer) – i.e. someone giving evidence that stands up in court. The Spirit is an active, interceding comforter and help.

**Peace:** We tend to forget the depth of the Biblical meaning of the word שָׁלוֹם [shalom] which means much more than just the absence of war or conflict. In its wide use it means: 1. completeness in number; 2. safety, soundness, in body; 3. welfare, health, prosperity; 4. peace, quiet, tranquility, contentment; 5. peace, friendship (in both human relationships and with God), as well as peace from war. The words of Jesus can take on deeper meaning when we hear this scripture in this way.

search for me, **you** will find me; if you seek me with all **your** heart, <sup>14</sup> I 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.

John 14:25-27

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>25</sup> [Jesus continued teaching, saying] "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup> But the **Advocate**, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. <sup>27</sup> **Peace** I leave with you; **my peace** I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

### Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

- What shimmers for you in these passages?
- What word, phrase or image touches your life today?
- How do you feel like an exile, a stranger in a strange land?
- How do you need (or how has God already) to find God in the dislocation and disruption that characterizes our time?
- How have you experienced the shalom-peace of God to be different than the peace of the world?