LIFE GROUP

Strangers & Exiles

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Stanwich
CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH

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> We hope you will utilize this booklet to help you go deeper into the scripture we preach on Sundays.

Strangers & Exiles: "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy," C.S. Lewis once said, "the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." In this five-week sermon series, we learn about our status as "strangers and exiles" and how to serve God while we await our future home.

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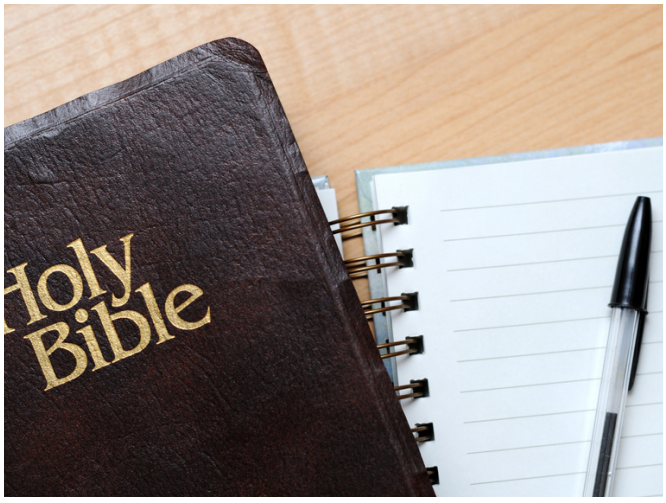


— Jeremiah 29:10-14

Found & Fortunate

Jeremiah 20 contains a letter from the prophet in Jerusalem to the Israelite captives living in Babylon. In this letter, he admonishes them to do the following: build houses, plant gardens, take wives, have sons, give daughters in marriage, and multiply. This all seems perfectly reasonable, but then, there is a surprise in the text. They are also to pray for the welfare of Babylon, "for in its welfare, [they] will find [their] welfare." God is calling them to bless the city of their captors. God is calling them to bless the very ones that destroyed His temple and killed many of his people. This text shows us the paradoxical call of our faith to bless even those that curse us.

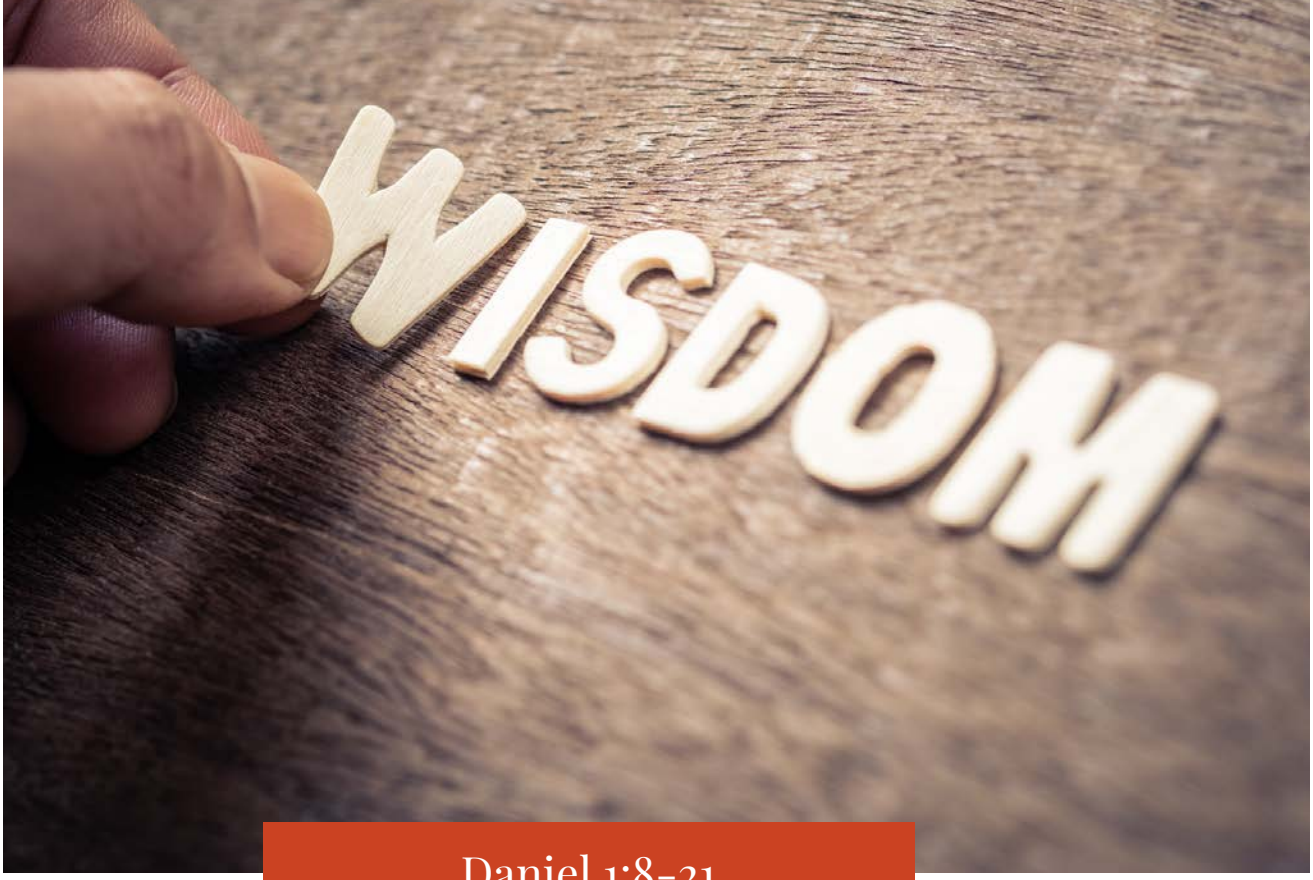
QUESTIONS

1. Jeremiah 29:11 is a text often subject to what biblical scholars call “eisegesis,” which simply means to “isolate,” this is often done with famous verses. In eisegesis, we often read our own opinions and desires onto the text. We can prevent this by looking at a verse within the context. So, what is the context of Jeremiah 29:11? Therefore, what is it actually saying?

2. What stands out to you from this promise made by the Lord?

PRAYER PROMPT

Heavenly Father, help me to see your vision for where I am planted in this season and to pray for the welfare of my city. Amen.



Daniel 1:8-21

Faithful & Favored

Daniel means “God is my judge,” and throughout Daniel’s life, we can see him leaning into the meaning of his name. In Daniel chapter 1, he “resolved” not to eat unclean food, but this is not the last time he would fear God over man. Daniel’s resolve reminds us of what Solomon states in Proverbs 9:10, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” and what Jesus would later state in Matthew 10:28, “and do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Daniel is faithful, but it is important to remember that this text is not ultimately about him. Rather this text points us to our God, who is faithful to his people even in the midst of exile.

QUESTIONS

1. One verse that keeps me awake personally is found in James 3:1. Feel free to read it. I have one main driving force that motivates me in my speech and conduct as a teacher: the fear of the Lord. How does this motivate you?

2. Daniel stays true to Yahweh in the midst of the exile. How is his model important for us?

PRAYER PROMPT

Heavenly Father, grant me the grace to remain faithful to you in times of testing and uncertainty. Amen.

Writing on the Wall

Daniel 5:13-31

The “writing on the wall” is a colloquialism rooted in what takes place in Daniel 5. This modern phase is one of many found in the scriptures. Daniel 5 tells the story of the Babylonian ruler Belshazzar, a rich and debauched king, who gave a banquet to his court. During the drunken party, the sacred vessels from the Jewish temple, stolen by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, were used in a blasphemous manner. At the height of the festivities, a man’s hand was seen writing on the wall the mysterious words “mene mene tekel upharsin” (verse 25). The king was terrified. But no one could understand what the words meant. All attempts at interpretation by Belshazzar’s wise men failed until the prophet Daniel was called in. The handwriting on the wall proved true. In fact, it proved fatal for the dissolute Belshazzar. Just as Daniel had said, the kingdom of Babylon was divided between the Medes and Persians, and it happened that very night. Belshazzar was slain, and his kingdom passed to Darius the Mede (Daniel 5:30–31).

QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever seen the “handwriting on the wall” in your life? If so, what happened?

2. John warns us of “practicing sin,” what is the difference between actively making sin a “practice” and just sinning? Why is it important to know the difference?

PRAYER PROMPT

Heavenly Father, search me and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen.

Strangers & Exiles

Hebrews 11:13-16

The promise of the Messiah was made to Abraham and Sarah, and they believed it. Yet they died having never received it. When we consider the intellectual category of biblical “promise,” we must look beyond our current circumstances. Abraham and Sarah lived in faith and died in faith. This is important. Though they did have faith, they did also die. Abraham and Sarah ultimately remind us that living by faith is easier when we remember this world is not our home. That we seek a homeland and a better heavenly country.

QUESTIONS

1. What are some practices that help you remember that you are a stranger and exile in this world?

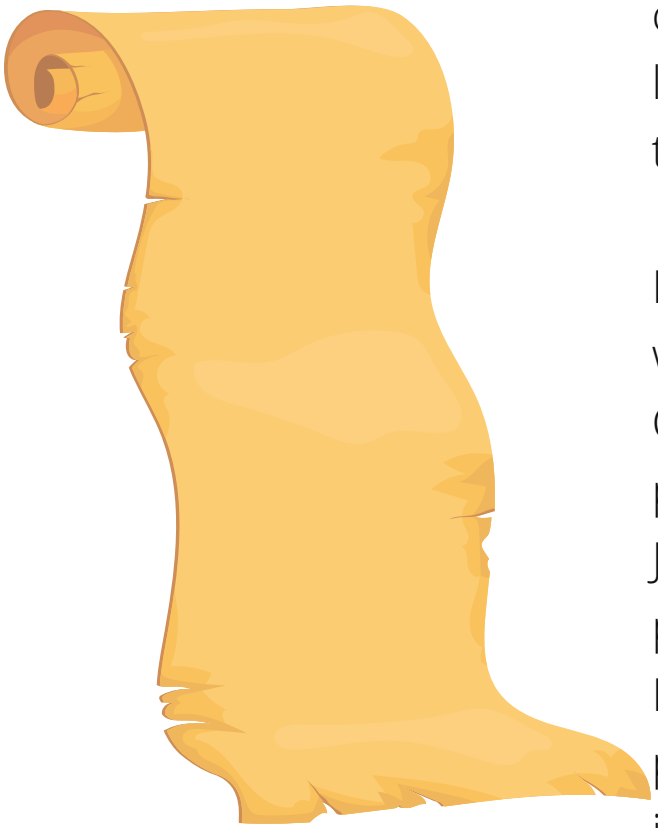
2. What promises are you believing God for today?

PRAYER PROMPT

Heavenly Father, grant me the grace to have unwavering faith and to believe in the promises of God in light of eternity. Amen.

Brought Up & Out

Ezra 1:1-11



Cyrus made a decree giving the Jewish exiles in his empire the right to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple in 538 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-4 and Ezra 5:13-17). “The greater part of this book, though it bears the name of Ezra, tells of the pioneers who came back from exile to Jerusalem a whole lifetime before him. We shall not meet Ezra till chapter 7.” (Kidner).

It is quite possible that the prophet Daniel was instrumental in this stirring up of Cyrus. He may have shown the king the prophecies of Jeremiah 25:8-13 and Jeremiah 29:10-14, which refer to the punishment of Babylon and the end of Israel’s exile. And if he showed Cyrus such prophecies, he almost certainly would have included Isaiah 44:28-45:5, which mentions Cyrus by name some 150 years before he was born

QUESTIONS

1. What stands out to you from this text?

2. What do we learn about God's character from these verses?

PRAYER PROMPT

Heavenly Father, you are faithful in accomplishing your purposes on earth. Please show me the role you want me to play in your redemptive plan for mankind. Amen.

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