

Building Bridges to the City

Jeremiah 29

Introduction: Too often the church has been an island – isolated from the world around it. The island experience might be safe. It might be comfortable. But it is not what God calls the church to be in this world. Rather our mission requires that we build bridges to the community – two-way bridges that will take us out into the community and bring the community closer to us. Only then will we be in a position to see **many people** come to faith in Christ and begin experiencing God in all of life. May this study spur us on to be better bridge builders.

Opening Discussion: If Faith EFC were to disappear, would Manhattan notice? Explain your thoughts.

BABYLON (*Background information from Easton's Bible Dictionary*)

In the third year of Jehoiachim, the eighteenth king of Judah (B.C. 605). Nebuchadnezzar having overcome the Egyptians at Carchemish, advanced to Jerusalem with a great army. After a brief siege he took that city, and carried away the vessels of the sanctuary to Babylon, and dedicated them in the Temple of Belus 2Ki 24:1 2Ch 36:6,7 Da 1:1,2 He also carried away the treasures of the king, whom he made his vassal. At this time, from which is dated the "seventy years" of captivity Jer 25:1 ... Da 9:1,2 Daniel and his companions were carried to Babylon, there to be brought up at the court and trained in all the learning of the Chaldeans. After this, in the fifth year of Jehoiakim, a great national fast was appointed Jer 36:9 during which the king, to show his defiance, cut up the leaves of the book of Jeremiah's prophecies as they were read to him in his winter palace, and threw them into the fire. In the same spirit he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar 2Ki 24:1 who again a second time (B.C. 598) marched against Jerusalem, and put Jehoiachim to death, placing his son Jehoiachin on the throne in his stead. But Jehoiachin's counselors displeasing Nebuchadnezzar, he again a third time turned his army against Jerusalem, and carried away to Babylon a second detachment of Jews as captives, to the number of 10,000 2Ki 24:13 Jer 24:1 2Ch 36:10 among whom were the king, with his mother and all his princes and officers, also Ezekiel, who with many of his companions were settled on the banks of the river Chebar (q.v.). He also carried away all the remaining treasures of the temple and the palace, and the golden vessels of the sanctuary. Mattaniah, the uncle of Jehoiachin, was now made king over what remained of the kingdom of Judah, under the name of Zedekiah 2Ki 24:17 2Ch 36:10 After a troubled reign of eleven years his kingdom came to an end 2Ch 36:11 Nebuchadnezzar, with a powerful army, besieged Jerusalem, and Zedekiah became a prisoner in Babylon. His eyes were put out, and he was kept in close confinement till his death 2Ki 25:7 The city was spoiled of all that was of value, and then given up to the flames. The temple and palaces were consumed, and the walls of the city were levelled with the ground (B.C. 586) and all that remained of the people, except a number of the poorest class who were left to till the ground and dress the vineyards, were carried away captives to Babylon. This was the third and last deportation of Jewish captives. The land was now utterly desolate, and was abandoned to anarchy.

Read Jeremiah 28:1-4, 10-17

1. What did Hananiah prophesy about the exile?

2. In Jeremiah's God-given prophecy, what does it mean when God says that he has "put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar" (v. 14)?

Read Jeremiah 9:1-7

3. What do you know about the nation of Babylon?
4. What is the big picture message of the letter that Jeremiah sent?
5. What commands does God give to the exiles?
6. Regarding the city within which the exiles dwelt, what were they to do?
7. In what ways are the commands in verse 7 counter-intuitive?
8. At a heart level, what might have been required of the Israelites to truly pray for the welfare of the city in which they dwelt as exiles?

Steve said:

Should we not also seek the welfare (shalom) of our city? In short, I would have to answer with a resounding "yes!" We too are supposed to "seek the well-being" of Manhattan, Kansas and pray to God on its behalf. Just like the Jews in Babylon, we are supposed to avoid being an island, isolated from our community; rather, we are supposed to actively work for its well-being . . . like the Jews in Babylon: we are living in a land that is not our home. Peter said that we live in this world like strangers and aliens (1 Peter 2:11). Paul wrote that our citizenship is in heaven from which Jesus will one day return (Philippians 3:20). This world is not our home – just like Babylon was not the Jews' home. And just as it would have been wrong for the Jews to be indifferent or hostile concerning the well-being of Babylon, it is wrong for us to be indifferent or hostile concerning the well-being of our city. Just as the Jews were supposed to be the light of the world, Jesus said that we should let our light shine before others so that they might see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven (Matthew 5).

9. In what ways do you sense that God would have us seek the welfare of our city?

Steve said:

As we did last year, this year we are designating October, November, and December as a "Season of Service." Sometimes these months are called the "holiday season", but we're designating it a Season of Service. The idea is that each of us here at Faith would serve outside the walls of the church at least once during these months.

We are going to provide some opportunities for us to serve in groups. We're in conversation with a couple of elementary schools here in Manhattan about how we might serve them. There's the possibility of doing some Saturday-morning work days that could really provide significant help to these schools. Habitat for Humanity has a retail outlet (called ReStore) that is open the first Saturday of the month; we plan to staff that store either in November or December (or both). We provide meals for the Manhattan Emergency Shelter on the 20th of each month; that's an option for some of you. We will provide some "Season of Service" opportunities.

As well, we'd like to encourage (or even challenge) you to discern opportunities for service in our community. Some of you are involved in organizations that might need workers this time of year. Independent of an organization you might be aware of someone in the community that could use help that we could offer. We want to give you the green light to dream about how we might seek the well-being of our community. Ask the question, "How can we build bridges to our community through serving?"

10. What ideas do you have about building bridges to our community through serving during this Season of Service? What kinds of things are you drawn to?

If you would like to receive information about upcoming service opportunities, please sign up at the Faith EFC website (www.faithmanhattan.org) for email updates.