

## **PODCAST START:**

Brian: Welcome to the Queer Theology podcast!

Fr. Shay: Where each episode, we take a queer look at the week's lectionary readings. We're the co-founders of QueerTheology.com and the hosts for this podcast. I'm Father Shay Kearns

B: And I'm Brian G. Murphy.

B: Good morning! Today is Sunday, October 13th, 2019. This is episode 298 of the Queer Theology podcast. I can hardly believe how long we've been doing this. We've got some exciting announcements coming up around our episode 300, so stay tuned for that. Today we are going to be looking at Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7 I will read it to you now.

The prophet Jeremiah sent a letter from Jerusalem to the few surviving elders among the exiles, to the priests and the prophets, and to all the people Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon from Jerusalem.

The Lord of heavenly forces, the God of Israel, proclaims to all the exiles I have carried off from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and settle down; cultivate gardens and eat what they produce. Get married and have children; then help your sons find wives and your daughters find husbands in order that they too may have children. Increase in number there so that you don't dwindle away. Promote the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because your future depends on its welfare.

I'm really excited to dive into this passage because there's a few things that I think are gonna be juicy for our listeners. So Shay, what comes up for you?

FS: Yeah, I love this. You know, we've been talking a lot in the Bible course that we just finished. We talked a lot about understanding the historical context of scripture and how that, unless you understand the historical context, you miss a lot. And we talked about how the Hebrew scriptures, in particular, were written in exile. Right? So much of the Hebrew scriptures is about the people of Israel being taken away from their homeland and away from the land that they had been promised. Living in exile, far away from home and with people in charge of them.

So I love that we have this little tidbit of a passage, right? It's really short, but there's so much stuff in it and the instructions that they are being given from God, the God who has promised them that they would have their own land --- a land of their own where they can worship freely, is now to settle down in this city where they are in exile. And I can just imagine how traumatic that would have been for the people to hear. And not only that but they're being told to get married and have kids, and then help their kids get married and have kids. So we're talking like they're gonna be in exile for a really long time, and that's gotta be devastating to hear that this promise that they have been waiting for is not coming anytime soon. And that even when it does come, that they probably won't see it. But what I love is the kind of insidiousness of the end of

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## Settling Down & Surviving Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

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this passage or this bit that we get, "Promote the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile... because your future depends on its welfare."

I think that this is fascinating, right? Because they're being told, basically to help the people who took them into exile. And I think that in the conservative Christian whatever, that I would've grown up hearing this it would've been, you know, because God has your back in the end, so it's a way to convert them, it's a way to be --- whatever. I think that really, it's this sense of like, no this is a survival tactic when you are outnumbered, you need to have some allies, and some protection in place. I think that this is a prophet telling the people, we're gonna be here for a while, so figure out how to survive. And again this isn't a sense of "get comfy here" and "just disappear into the woodwork". This is a survival tactic, it's a survival mechanism. I think that as people who care about justice for all and who don't want to disappear into empire, the empire the United States, or the empire of imperialism. It's important that we tease out the tension of these passages. It's important to survive. Also, don't get too comfortable. There's all sorts of tensions here that I find really interesting.

B: Yeah, it reminds me a little bit about coming out, actually, or before you come out. I think that the goal for queer folks is to be able to live fully into your truth whether that means coming out publicly, whether that means if you're trans - transitioning stealthfully and living into your gender. Whatever living into your queer truth looks like, I think the goal is that we would leave exile, that we would leave the closet, that we would leave being hemmed in, to live into that. And also, sometimes, it's not safe yet. That you're financially dependent upon parents or family members, that you're a minor living at home, that you're at a school on a scholarship, and that's the only way that you can afford school, and you can't violate their codes. Sometimes you just have to do whatever it takes to survive. I think that that tension that you were talking about is true for queer people. Sometimes you have to do what it takes to survive and that means not coming out or being selective in who you come out to or how you come out to. But also, not being so invested in straight supremacy that you end up reinforcing the closet that you find yourself in. That there's this tension between, I got to do what it takes right now, but the end goal down the line is to be free from this exile.

So I know that whenever we're talking about queer folks and Christianity, or queer folks and religion. Anytime in the Bible where there's anything about people getting married, and it's like men marrying women I hear anti-LGBTQ people be like, "See! Look at all these examples of straight people!" and "Where are the gay people in the Bible?" That message becomes so insidious that queer folks sometimes can see that also. And this beautiful text about exile and liberation, if you run it through the wrong lens can somehow be like, "Well, what does it say about gay people?" So Shay, what would you say to people who are reading this and seeing all this talk about husbands getting married to wives, and sons finding their wives, and daughters finding husbands. What place does that have here?

FS: I mean again, we have to focus on historical context, right? I'm sure that gay and queer people existed in Bible times. We know that right?

B: Yup!

FS: We also know that we didn't have words or language around that. They're not gonna talk about that probably. Also, this passage is really specific of like, we need you to procreate so that there's more of you.

B: Exactly. Yup!

FS: Right? And so, we can talk about how gay people can also procreate, and that there are lots of different ways to form families. But this was a very specific line about, I need you to have a lot of babies so that the line continues. And we know, right? That even queer folks have parented children have had children. There are lots of different ways for that to happen. So these passages don't necessarily exclude queer people even though it's obviously very specifically about a certain type of procreation.

B: Yeah. So a few weeks ago, I was on this podcast called Drunk Bible Study and they're reading through Deuteronomy. That's where they are in the podcast right now, and sort of reacting to it, and sort of feeling like there's this sense of imperialism, and let go, and take and settle land that's not yours. And one of the things that I shared with them is what we've been talking about in this course and throughout Queer Theology. The Hebrew Bible was written in the context of exile, and so you have to remember that these are an oppressed minority, community. Trying to struggle to survive. When you understand that, it changes the perspective like right now, in the whole world --- American Christians are this political powerful force. So it looks a lot different to say to a politically powerful religious group to let go, and live there, and settle, and reproduce, and spread, and take over. We're this really small, fragile community, struggling to survive. What does it mean to define our ethnic identity and want to reproduce so that we don't literally die of? Remembering the historical context is so, so important. I think, for me, enriches scripture, it doesn't diminish it. That bringing this whole history to it is a sacred thing to do.

[outro music plays]

B: The Queer Theology podcast is just one of many things that we do at [QueerTheology.com](http://QueerTheology.com) which provides resources, community, and inspiration for LGBTQ Christians and straight cisgender supporters.

FS: To dive into more of the action, visit us at [QueerTheology.com](http://QueerTheology.com). You can also connect with us online: on Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, and Instagram.

B: We'll see you next week.

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