

Jeremiah 29:1-20 • Our Hope & Future

Introduction

One of the tendencies of Christians is to quote a verse that by itself sounds applicable, but if studied within the context of the Scripture around it reveals a different meaning intended by God. Jeremiah 29:11 is one of the most universally known verses, often quoted by Christians to encourage others going through difficult times or trying to discern what God is doing presently in their life. When studied in context, however, it is not a blanket promise of God that covers everything. It's something God said within a specific context to Israel which certainly has application for us as well, but it's not a blank check to keep going on "business as usual". In reality, it's part of a call to specific action to ensure that His plans do, indeed, come to fruition for our best hope and future.

¹Now these are the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the rest of the elders of the exile, the priests, the prophets and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. ²(This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the court officials, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem.) ³The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, saying, ⁴"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, ⁵'Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. ⁷Seek 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 have welfare.' ⁸For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Do not let your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream. ⁹For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them,' declares the LORD.

[Read v.1-9]

Q: What is the historical context of this chapter? Who, specifically, are these captives?

A: The whole of Israel was taken away in 4 deportations. The northern kingdom of Israel was carried away first by Assyria about 100 years prior to the first deportation of Judah to Babylon. (Having conquered Assyria, those captives were now actually in exile under Babylon.) The first deportation of the southern kingdom of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar occurred during the reign of Jehoiakim around 605 B.C., which included Daniel. The second occurred about 8 years later in 597 B.C. when Jehoiachin (also known here as Jeconiah) was carried away with Ezekiel. There was one, last and final deportation yet to come in 587 B.C. when the temple and Jerusalem would be completely destroyed. So this is taking place before the 4th and final deportation.

Point: *The people were divided geographically, some already in exile and listening to false prophets concerning their return, and those still in Judah listening to false prophets that they had escaped judgment and nothing further was coming. They have been transplanted physically, but they have yet to undergo the necessary spiritual transplantation that would reconcile them spiritually.*

Q: With what title does God open the letter? What might it communicate to those in either geographic location?

A: "The LORD of hosts". The meaning conveyed is the God of the armies above and below, who uses the earthly forces of Nebuchadnezzar to accomplish His will. It's a message of God's sovereignty over the whole situation no matter where they are physically **OR** spiritually.

Q: How is the Lord of hosts' sovereignty further confirmed in v.4?

A: God does not credit the earthly armies of Babylon with accomplishing anything, but specifically states, "to all the exiles **I have sent into exile**".

Point: *Regardless of physical conditions, God is in control.*

Q: Obviously v.8-9 highlights the problem that the people are listening to false prophets contrary to God's wishes. What are God's wishes in v.5-7 and what would be the consequences of listening to the false prophets instead?

- **"Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce"**. (v.5) God wanted to take care of all their physical needs now and for the foreseeable future; the false prophets were prophesying a quick return and therefore discouraging putting down roots. The false prophets wanted them to exchange God's future for their own version of

it.

- **“Take wives and become fathers...multiply there and do not decrease”**. (v.6) God wanted them to not merely survive, but thrive; the false prophets (at Satan’s behest) wanted their lineage to come to an end. The false prophets wanted them to forfeit not just their own future, but that of future generations as well.
- **“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 have welfare.”** (v.7) God wanted them to live at peace with their rulers; the false prophets wanted them to be at odds with their rulers. The false prophets wanted the current conditions to restrict, even eliminate, their future as much as possible.

Q: What historical event does this mirror wherein a people actually thrive and grow in captivity until the Lord releases them?

A: It’s exactly what happened in Egypt where they went in as dozens but came out as millions. What God is requesting is not unprecedented.

Q: But what is the basic problem of the people at this point?

A: They haven’t learned the right lesson from judgment and still hold to the false words and dreams of false prophets rather than to the Word of God. Basically they still love the darkness rather than the light.

“This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”

John 3:19-21

Point: Judgment doesn’t actually “end” when the physical acts of judgment are completed, but only when God’s **PURPOSE** for judgment has been accomplished. He doesn’t want punished people, He wants people who **RESPOND** to punishment and return in sincere repentance and commitment from the heart.

[Read v.10-14]

¹⁰“For thus says the LORD, ‘When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. ¹¹For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. ¹²Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. ¹³You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. ¹⁴I will be found by you,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.’”

Q: People often pull Jeremiah 29:11 out by itself and quote it as a promise of God to do good. But in its proper context, why is this not a promise to immediately wipe everything bad away and replace it instantly with something else?

- First, the judgment for the captivity is set for 70 years. Therefore the consequences of sin still have to be endured.
- Second, look at the conditions in v.12-13 that need to be present on **THEIR** part.
 - **“...you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me”**. (v.12) Not just crying out in desperation or because they’ve been “caught” in an act of sin, but a sincere return in their personal prayer and worship of Him.
 - **“You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.”** (v.13) A complete return to spiritual faithfulness.

Point: They are going through God’s judgment in order to be refined and changed into the kind of people who will conform to His plans for their hope and future. He is not simply “erasing” everything and pretending nothing happened. Becoming what God intends involves a personal commitment of faithfulness and

obedience to His Word and ways on our part.

Q: So what is the people's responsibility in order to obtain God's plans for their future?

- Endure the current circumstances, knowing they're brought about by God as a consequence for sin.
- Return to spiritual faithfulness in their personal obedience to and relationship with Him.

¹⁵“Because you have said, ‘The LORD has raised up prophets for us in Babylon’— ¹⁶for thus says the LORD concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, and concerning all the people who dwell in this city, your brothers who did not go with you into exile— ¹⁷thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Behold, I am sending upon them the sword, famine and pestilence, and I will make them like split-open figs that cannot be eaten due to rottenness. ¹⁸I will pursue them with the sword, with famine and with pestilence; and I will make them a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse and a horror and a hissing, and a reproach among all the nations where I have driven them, ¹⁹because they have not listened to My words,’ declares the LORD, ‘which I sent to them again and again by My servants the prophets; but you did not listen,’ declares the LORD. ²⁰You, therefore, hear the word of the Lord, all you exiles, whom I have sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon.

[Read v.15-20]

Q: What is meant in v.15? Why would those already in exile be comforted by the presence of prophets?

A: The false prophets were trying to persuade those already in captivity that the proof they would soon be returned was the fact that there was still an unconquered remnant in Judah. The false prophets therefore asserted that the situation was only temporary and everyone would soon be returned to Judah. This is why God goes on to explain that He will prove these prophets false by bringing judgment on the remainder in Judah, sending **everyone** into captivity.

Q: And what, exactly, is the behavior that is bringing about this final judgment?

A: “...because they have not listened to My words...which I sent to them again and again by My servants the prophets...” (v.19) It's the exact problem the exiles are having. The problem in each location is the same: not adhering to God's Word.

Q: What is the only way that they are going to see God's plans for their hope and future come to fruition?

A: “You, therefore, hear the word of the LORD, all you exiles...” (V.20) Rejecting the false for the true.

Overall Application

False teaching tries to get you to excuse your current circumstances so you can justify continuing to please yourself, living according to the ways which brought on the circumstances in the first place. The only cure for disobedience is obedience.

- *Although it's true that God has good plans for you, what prevents them from taking effect? Do you expect these things to happen without a commitment to change on your part?*
- *Do you see that the real context of this great promise of God is within the situation of discipline for sin? Can you see that to become all that God intends that it requires learning the right lesson from discipline?*
- *How well do you see the need for obedience while enduring discipline? Can you see how it contributes to the outcome? Can you see that false influences will try to disengage you from proper endurance? Or to “redefine” what's going on to allow you to continue in sin?*