

Present  
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Jeremiah 29:4-14

Imagine the emotion, the body language, and the frustration of these words: *“I didn’t want to come here, I don’t want to stay, and I’m NOT going to have a good time!”* Those words could be the outburst of a toddler, the complaint of a teen that didn’t get their way, or the sincere disillusioned cry of someone grieving a circumstance they never imagined for themselves due to a health crisis, a job loss, a financial set-back, a broken marriage, or the loss of a loved one. They were likely the words of the citizens of Judah after they had been exiled to Babylon. *“Lord, why am I here? I just want to escape! Won’t you put things back like they were? I need answers!”*

Jeremiah 29 is God’s letter (through the pen of Jeremiah) to those exiles, and to anyone who feels deserted in a chapter of life they never imagined. God told them (and us), *“I know what I’m doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for...’ but My timetable is different than yours and I need you to surrender to that plan.”*<sup>i</sup>

Those words sound familiar because they are a paraphrase of Jeremiah 29:11: *“<sup>11</sup> For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”*<sup>ii</sup> Unfortunately, many people take that verse out of context and cling to it like a biblical “security blanket.” Some “false prophets” in our day (as in Jeremiah’s day) use it to promote positive thinking and prosperity preaching. Today we’ll look at what God REALLY said.

The point: Within God’s sovereign plan, He allows all people (saved and unsaved) to go through twists and turns in life for which we would never volunteer. Followers of Christ must ask for the grace to say to Him: *“I don’t know why I’m here, but I DO know You Lord; so I will trust Your plan and move forward in faith because of Your track record of steadfast love and faithfulness.”*

A little context before the text: As God had warned, He used “...Babylon as His agent of judgment against Israel for their sins of idolatry and rebellion against Him. There were actually several different times during this period (607-586 B.C.) when the Jews were taken captive by Babylon.”<sup>iii</sup> In this letter to those exiles God instructed them how to trust Him in a difficult chapter. Let’s read beginning in verse four to see what it says, what it means, and how it should change us.

**Jeremiah 29:4–14 (NLT) — 4** This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says to all the captives he has exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem: **5** “Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce. **6** Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many

grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! **7** And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare.” **8** This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: “Do not let your prophets and fortune-tellers who are with you in the land of Babylon trick you. Do not listen to their dreams, **9** because they are telling you lies in my name. I have not sent them,” says the Lord. **10** This is what the Lord says: “You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. **11** For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. **12** In those days when you pray, I will listen. **13** If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. **14** I will be found by you,” says the Lord. “I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes. I will gather you out of the nations where I sent you and will bring you home again to your own land.”

- Verse four makes it plain this message came from God. That is in contrast to the false prophecies of a seer named Hananiah recorded in chapter 28.
- Hananiah said, *“Don’t worry, everything will be back to normal in two years.”* In verses 8-10, God set the people straight on this: *“Don’t listen to the lies of false prophets; settle in, you’ll be here seventy years.”*
- False prophets tell people what they want to hear instead of what they NEED to hear. That was Hananiah; God took him out for his sin. (28:17)
- What is the parallel to Hananiah in our day that we must guard against? How can we be certain that someone is delivering a message from God?
- Not only did this false prophet’s lies get the people’s hopes up, he was also implying that God wasn’t punishing them for their sin. *“You’re not bad people, you are just victims. Think positively and God will rescue you!”*
- When we are going through a tough chapter, we must beware of people who give us easy answers and tell us only what we want to hear.
- Instead, God told them, *“Build homes, plant gardens, marry and have children and then grandchildren, you’re going to be here seventy years.”*
- Verse six: Why was it important that they multiply while in captivity?
- Wiersbe: *“It was important that the exiles have families so there would be people available to return to Judea when the Captivity ended. This small Jewish remnant was holding in its hands the future of God’s great plan of salvation, and they must obey Him, be fruitful, and multiply (v. 6).”<sup>iv</sup>*
- Verse seven was a fairly radical command: *“Work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile.”* *“What? Shouldn’t we fight back against the Babylonians?”* *“No, pray for Babylon. Their welfare will determine your welfare.”* The word for peace is “shalom” which actually means *“completeness, soundness, welfare, peace.”<sup>v</sup>*
- Note in that verse God plainly said: *“I sent you into exile.”* God not only allowed this, He orchestrated it as judgment for Judah’s sin.
- Sometimes problems in life are due to bad choices and disobedience to God. If so, we need to confess, ask for forgiveness, and turn in the other direction in repentance. That was the problem for the nation of Judah.

- Other times God allows difficult seasons in our lives not because of sin in our lives, but for purposes only He understands.
- In both cases, this text teaches us to surrender and trust Him rather than fight against His will.
- Verses ten and following contain prophecy, promises and a prescription.
- The prophecy: They would be in exile seventy years and no less.
- Promise number one: After seventy years God would bring them home.
- Promise number two: "...I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "...plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."
- Note that God didn't say, "*Let me SHOW the plans I have for you.*" God KNOWS His plans for us but isn't obligated to SHOW His plans. That's where trusting His character and track record comes into play.
- Charles Spurgeon: "*God is too good to be unkind and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart.*"<sup>vi</sup>
- Confident hope in God is not just wishful thinking!
- **Romans 5:3–5 (ESV) — 3** ...we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, **4** and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, **5** and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.
- Jeremiah 29:11 is a wonderful and accurate verse but we must NOT take it out of context as a "proof text" that life in Christ is a "bed of roses."
- That would violate other scripture like John 16:33 ("You will have trouble. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."<sup>vii</sup>)
- Mary DeMuth writes, "*God's heart in Jeremiah 29:11 is not that we escape our lot, but that we learn to thrive in the midst of it.*" She continues, "*Yes, of course God knows the plans He has for us. And ultimately He will give us a glorious future. But as we walk out our lives on this crazy earth, let's remember that the best growth comes through persevering through trials, not escaping them entirely. And when we learn perseverance, we find surprising joy.*"<sup>viii</sup>
- After those promises God gave the people in exile a prescription to follow: **12** In those days when you pray, I will listen. **13** If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. **14** I will be found by you,"
- That is our ACTION STEP when we are in a difficult chapter! Seek Him with all our hearts. You don't have to teach this concept to a child. When they are hurting they run to their parent for comfort and help. Unfortunately, we grow out of that instinct. When we are in trouble we either try to fix it ourselves or we run to somewhere other than God.
- Seeking Him means fervent prayer and diving deeply into His word. It means having a heart of openness to whatever His plans are.
- As we said, when sin is involved (Judah's case) there must also be repentance so God can restore us.
- **2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV) — 14** if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked

ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

- Regardless of whether God is disciplining us or just growing us in a tough season, we need to live out the words of that old hymn: “Trust and obey.”
- God’s final promise for Judah was in the last words of verse fourteen: *“I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes. I will gather you out of the nations where I sent you and will bring you home again to your own land.”*
- He did bring His people back to Jerusalem and one day when Christ returns to earth we will see the final fulfillment of that promise to Israel.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- *“Lord, why am I here? I just want to escape; won’t you put things back like they were? I need answers!” [Illustration: My Grandmother’s loss]*
- Within God’s sovereign plan, He allows all people (saved and unsaved) to go through twists and turns in life for which we would never volunteer.
- Followers of Christ must ask for the grace to say to Him: *“I don’t know why I’m here, but I DO know You Lord, so I will trust Your plan and move forward in faith because of Your track record of steadfast love and faithfulness.”*
- In those difficult seasons we shouldn’t look for easy answers from people who just tell us what we want to hear, or try to kick down doors God isn’t opening. Instead we should cling to our confident hope that God loves us and has a plan for our good.
- Until that plan becomes clear, we must wait on Him and not get ahead of His timing. While we wait we must seek Him with all our hearts and obey what He is revealing to us from His word. We need to “trust and obey.”
- Though it may be difficult, we need to do what God told those exiles to do: *“By My grace and with My help, move ahead with life and persevere in this trial because you can trust that I know the plans I have for you...plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”*

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<sup>i</sup> Peterson, E. H. (2005). *The Message: the Bible in contemporary language* (Je  
<sup>ii</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Je 29:11). Wheaton, IL:  
Crossway Bibles.

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Babylonian-captivity-exile.html>

<sup>iv</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Decisive* (p. 124). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>v</sup> Thomas, R. L. (1998). *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries : updated edition*. Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc.

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1403154-god-is-too-good-to-be-unkind-and-he-is>

<sup>vii</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Jn 16:33). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>viii</sup> <https://www.marydemuth.com/jeremiah-29-11/grow-like-crazy/>