

# Session 33

## JEREMIAH

### *Jeremiah 29*

#### Memory Verse

*You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.*

– JEREMIAH 29:13, CSB



## Jeremiah

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** No matter the circumstances, we can rest assured that God's plans for our future are for our good.

**CALL TO ACTION:** Are you spending all your time and energy seeking God's plans or are you seeking God Himself?

In March of 2005, an Atlanta woman was taken hostage by a man, Brian Nichols, who was part of the largest manhunt in Georgia history to that point. Nichols had murdered several people and while on the run from authorities, took Ashley Smith hostage in her own home. This story became famous for what happened next—Smith began reading aloud to her captor.

Her reading material of choice was her Bible and Rick Warren's, *The Purpose Driven Life*. Over time, the words grabbed Nichols's attention, and they began to talk about the Lord. Ashley shared honestly with Nichols about the hope found in Christ. Eventually she was released, and Nichols surrendered.<sup>1</sup> Today's study covers a time when the Israelites were in a similar position with the opportunity to be a blessing on the very people who held them captive.

**?** What makes a story like this stand out? What is unexpected about it? How did Smith show the heart of Jesus for her enemy?

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When have you had a chance to witness to or bless someone who treated you badly? How did you respond?

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## Session Summary

The prophet Jeremiah wrote to the Israelites in captivity. Through Jeremiah, God delivered both good and hard news to His people. The hard news was that they were not coming back home soon. Their exile was going to last seventy years. This was not what they wanted to hear and was in direct conflict with what the false prophets declared.

The good news God sent was He had not forgotten them. The Lord told His people to settle in, build houses, and look for ways to bless those who had taken them into captivity. In the middle of trying circumstances, God always has a purpose and we use us. Through this prophecy, God promised that His plans for His people were good and that He would be found by those who called out to Him and sought Him with their whole hearts.

### 1. Word of Instruction (Jeremiah 29:1-9)

Jeremiah wrote from Jerusalem to the Israelites who had been taken captive and were in exile in Babylon. He specifically addressed the leaders of the exiles who had influence over the large community of Jewish people who now resided in the foreign, enemy territory of Babylon. This letter was a prophetic word from the Lord and was to be treated with the same respect and attention as a prophet's spoken word.

The letter included specific instructions for the people about how they were to live and conduct themselves in this foreign land. Being taken captive and finding yourself living in enemy territory might lend itself to staying ready to flee back home at a moment's notice. The surprising message from the Lord was that the people needed to settle in. They were in Babylon by the will of God as punishment for their rebellion. He told them to build houses and plant crops. Neither of these could be done or benefitted from quickly, a reminder that their stay in exile would not be short.

The Lord desired for His people to multiply and flourish even as they lived out their punishment. Just because they were in exile didn't mean God had forgotten about them or given up on them. He had plans in motion and instructed them to invest in their current place. God told the Israelites to do good in their communities and even bless their Babylonian neighbors. Though their circumstances were not perfect, they could still have an impact on the world around them and influence others for God's purposes.

**?** How can circumstances that are difficult or less than ideal cause you to miss opportunities to be a godly influence?  
How can you seek to take advantage of these opportunities?

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God reminded the people their current situation was of their own making due to rebellion and disregard for Him. But God also invited them to seek Him and that He would use them to be a blessing in Babylon. They were to seek the flourishing of the city of their captives, trusting that this would point to God as the One who brought about this thriving.

**?** When was a time you faced consequences of choosing your own way over that of the Lord? What opportunity was there for you to glorify Him, even in those consequences?

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Jeremiah also warned the people not to believe the false prophets among them. These false prophets and diviners were in the habit of telling people what they wanted to hear and not the truth of God or His word. They had been claiming that the exile would be short-lived, which contributed to the people being ready to depart quickly. This was contrary to the plans of the Lord, and He made it clear that these individuals were not speaking truth and were not to be followed.

**?** Application: When have you been tempted to believe something you wanted to hear over what you knew was God's will?

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## 2. Promise of Hope (Jeremiah 29:10-14)

The exile of the Israelites would not be open ended. God assured them that it would not last longer than seventy years. Even though this would be a long season of judgment, Jeremiah gave a clear timeline, according to the plans of the Lord. This was both good and bad news: it was good news that there was a designated end but bad news that it would not be immediate. Most of the current generation would die off, but the next generation would be blessed to return home.

This word from the Lord conflicted with what the false prophets had been teaching. We don't find ourselves in exile, but we face the same dilemma of listening to God or the world. The enemy tells people what they want to hear to try and draw us away from God. The best way to protect yourself from believing the lies of the world is to know the Word of God and to be familiar with His voice. The Lord assured the people that He would visit them and bring them home at the right time to fulfill His promise.

Verse 11 is a well-known passage where God declared His love for His people and His plans for a good future for them. Think about how comforting this would have been to those who were exiled and being punished due to their own choices. It can be tempting to think that when you sin and deserve punishment from the Lord that your future is over or at least ruined. God made it clear that He has good plans for the future of those who follow Him. It is encouraging to receive this promise with the certainty that it will be fulfilled just as every promise of God will be.



Where do you need the hope of a promised future today?

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Following this promise, God told the people what they needed to be doing in the meantime. While they waited for the promise to be fulfilled, the Israelites were to call on the Lord and seek Him wholeheartedly. We are to do the same as we wait to see what God is doing or where He is leading. God's people had turned to everything but the Lord and that was what landed them in exile. They listened to false prophets instead of the truth, and they allowed their hearts to be drawn away from worshiping the Lord alone.

**?** What threatens to draw your focus from the Lord? How can you guard against this?

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It is easy to get caught up in all the things that distract and draw us away from worshiping the Lord with our whole hearts. This passage reminds us of our need to call out to the Lord and seek Him. These instructions were accompanied by another powerful promise from God. When we seek Him with our whole hearts, we will find Him. God is not hiding from us or trying to deceive us. He wants to be found and has promised this to those who authentically seek Him.

**?** Application: What needs to change for you to seek God with your whole heart?

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### 3. Message of Judgment (Jeremiah 29:15-32)

The exiles Jeremiah wrote to in Babylon were not the only Israelites who faced judgment. There were still some of the people in Jerusalem and Judah who were as guilty of sin against God as those who had been taken into captivity. Some may have believed those who remained in the land were somehow superior to the ones taken captive, but God made it clear that all would face the punishment they due for their sinful ways.

**?** What are some ways we might look down on others, believing our sin to be less offensive to God? What is the danger in this?

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After addressing the non-exiled people, God turned His attention to the specific individuals remaining in Judah, like the false prophets. The Lord made it clear their unfaithfulness had been recorded and He took it into account. This is a reminder that God takes seriously what we say and how we live. He is witness to everything and will hold us all accountable just as He did these individuals who instructed against Him.

Jeremiah also called out by name some men who had actively opposed him as he spoke the words of the Lord to the people. To come against God's messenger was equated with coming against God.

**?** How does it encourage you to remember that God will answer those who reject His messengers in the world today?

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This chapter concludes with a promise from God of judgment on the false prophets who attacked Jeremiah. Scripture has various examples of God's justice toward worldly, sinful people who attack, demean, disrupt, and come against God's people. As we follow His will, we can entrust ourselves to His care and seek that His enemies would turn and follow Him also.

**?** Application: What's a situation where others oppose God and His message that you need to trust God's care for you in? How can you seek that these people also come to know Him?

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## Conclusion

Jeremiah shared a message from God that the Israelites would be in exile in Babylon for seventy years. While that reality was sobering, it was necessary. Once the people understood and accepted the length of time they would be in Babylon, they could receive God's instructions about how to live in that period. He told them to seek the well-being of the land and people around them. They were not to just wait until they made it back home but to build houses and settle in to be a blessing to even the Babylonians.

The Lord gave His people hope by assuring them of His plans for their future. They were not forgotten. God did not give up on them, but His plans were for good and their prosperity in the long run. He warned them not to listen to the false prophets among them who proclaimed a word in conflict with the truth.

It can be tempting to listen to and believe those who tell you only the things you want to hear. Though God's message was difficult to receive, it allowed the people to make the most of the time they spent in captivity, learning to call out to Him, and seek Him with their whole hearts. Sometimes it takes difficulty to draw God's people back to Him. The Lord promised that when the Israelites sought Him, they would find Him. We can trust that this is also true for us today.

**?** How is conviction over our sin and even facing the consequences for our sin ultimately good, even when very difficult?

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**?** How can we as a group seek faithfulness to God during hard seasons?

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**?** How can you seek the benefit of those around you so that you might have opportunity to point them to the truth about God?

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## Memorize

*You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.*

- Jeremiah 29:13, CSB

## References

<sup>1</sup>Erin Curry, "Hostage reads 'Purpose-Driven Life' to alleged Atlanta killer," Baptist Press, March 14, 2005, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/hostage-reads-purpose-driven-life-to-alleged-atlanta-killer/>