

Jeremiah

August 18, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Jeremiah 29

Session Outline

1. Word of Instruction (Jeremiah 29:1-9)
2. Promise of Hope (Jeremiah 29:10-14)
3. Message of Judgment (Jeremiah 29:15-32)

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?



Leader Guide

Jeremiah

Introduction

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.¹ 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?
- ❓ When have you had a chance to witness to or bless someone who treated you badly? How did you respond?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?


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?

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?

Ahab and Zedekiah

Jeremiah condemned two of the false prophets by name. Because of their immoral acts and false prophecies, the Lord would deliver them to the Babylonians for execution, probably on charges of rebellion.

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?

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?
- How can we as a group seek faithfulness to God during hard seasons?
- How can you seek the benefit of those around you so that you might have opportunity to point them to the truth about God?

Prayer of Response

Thank the Lord for His good plans for your future. Cry out to Him about the ways you are seeking Him to act on your behalf. Praise Him that He has promised that those who seek Him will find Him.

Memory Verse

You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. – Jeremiah 29:13

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Jeremiah, Lamentations* by Steven Smith
- *Be Decisive* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Jeremiah and Lamentations* by Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Jeremiah

Purpose

Jeremiah is the prophet of the “word of the Lord” (1:2). Of the 349 times the OT uses the phrase “thus says the Lord,” Jeremiah accounts for 157 of them. But this prophetic word that Jeremiah spoke was more than an objective revelation from God to the nation; God’s words were to be joy and food for Jeremiah’s own soul. As 15:16 states, “Your words were found, and I ate them. Your words became a delight to me and the joy of my heart.” However, God’s word was sometimes a burden to the prophet. He sometimes grew tired of bringing God’s message of judgment to an unresponsive people.

Author

Jeremiah was a priest from the town of Anathoth (1:1). At the Lord’s command, he neither married nor had children because of the impending judgment that would come upon the next generation. His ministry as a prophet began in 626 BC and ended after 586 BC. He was a contemporary of Habakkuk and possibly Obadiah.

Setting

The book of Jeremiah discusses the last days of Judah. King Hezekiah reigned for forty-two years (729–686 BC) and began to reverse Judah’s spiritual bankruptcy. But when Hezekiah’s son, Manasseh, came to the throne, idolatrous and superstitious cultic practices and rites came back like a flood. Manasseh’s son Amon ruled for only two years (642–640 BC). He also reinstated idol worship as the official religion of Judah (2Ch 33:22–23).

Amon’s eight-year-old son, Josiah, succeeded him on the throne. This lad “walked in the ways” of the former King David. When he was eighteen years old (622 BC), he called for long-delayed repairs to be made to the temple. During this work, a copy of the law of Moses was found. On the basis of hearing this word, the young king and all his people renewed the covenant with the Lord. However, this reformation failed to overcome the effects of the wickedness Manasseh and Amon had instituted.

Special Features

The book and prophet Jeremiah hold at least two great distinctions among all the Old Testament prophets. (1) This is the longest Prophetic Book in the Bible (1,364 verses). (2) Jeremiah’s life is more fully described than any of the other fifteen writing prophets. Into the tumultuous times of the last half of the seventh century and the first quarter of the sixth century BC, came this prophet bearing a word from God for the stubborn people of Judah. The book’s contents span roughly from 640 to 580 BC.

Extended Commentary

Jeremiah 29:1-32

29:1 The remaining exiled elders appears to describe those who had survived deportation to Babylon.

29:2 King Jeconiah is another name for King Jehoiachin (see 22:24–30). The Hebrew form of queen mother is a feminine ending on the same masculine form for “a mighty man of valor” or a “hero” (Hb *haggevira*). The court officials (Hb *hassarim*) is usually rendered “eunuchs,” but it was also a title for palace officers (52:25; Gn 37:36; 40:2; 1Sm 8:15).

29:3 Jeremiah sent his letter to the exiles in Babylon by two of King Zedekiah’s emissaries to Nebuchadnezzar. The two men who carried the letter were Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiah. Shaphan was a sort of secretary of state under King Josiah (2Kg 22:8–14), and Gemariah was the high priest under Josiah (2Ch 34–35). Despite a crooked government and priesthood, these men show that some people remained faithful to the Lord, even during the worst of times.

29:4–7 Jeremiah’s letter must have arrived in Babylon shortly after the exiles did. It warned that this would not be a short exile.

29:7 Jeremiah’s advice to the exiles was remarkable. He urged them to pray for Babylon and its prosperity. By doing this, the exiles would thrive as well (1Tm 2:1–2).

29:8–9 See 27:15.

29:10 The seventy years for Babylon are also noted in 25:11. The duration of the Babylonian kingdom is linked with the length of the exile (see 25:11). From Nebuchadnezzar’s accession to the throne in 605 BC to the fall of Babylon in 539 BC was sixty-six years.

29:11 Many a faithful believer has found comfort in these words of hope.

29:12–14 These verses are a renewal of God’s promise in Dt 30:3–5.

29:15–19 Many interpreters think these verses are misplaced since Jeremiah was so critical of Zedekiah in a letter carried by his ambassadors. But vv. 4–23 may not be a single letter. Verses 15–19 could be a second letter not carried to Babylon by the king’s officials.

29:17 The people left in Jerusalem who were not among the initial exiles will be made like rotten figs. This same imagery appears in chap. 24.

29:20–23 Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah were two prophets singled out for committing adultery with their neighbors’ wives as well as prophesying lies. There is a wordplay here. The name Kolaiah is related to the Hebrew term *qelalah* (“curse”) and *qalah* (“to burn”). Thus they

would roast in the fire. So heinous were their lying prophecies that the king of Babylon would charge them with treason and condemn them to death by burning (Dn 3:6, 20, 23).

29:24–25 Shemaiah the Nehelamite was another false prophet. He had apparently ordered the priest Zephaniah to silence Jeremiah. Zephaniah was warden over police regulations in the temple (21:1; 37:3; 52:24).

29:26 Shemaiah charged Jeremiah with being a madman.

29:27–28 See v. 5.

29:29–32 Zephaniah the priest read Shemaiah's letter to Jeremiah, who responded with another letter from the Lord to the exiles. He exposed Shemaiah's hypocrisy and set his punishment—that he would have no descendants and he would not live to see the restoration God had predicted. No harm, however, came to Jeremiah, in fulfillment of God's promise (1:8, 19; 15:20).²

References

1. 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/>
2. Walter Kaiser Jr., "Jeremiah," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1185–1186.