

Fact Sheet for **“Two Letters”**
Jeremiah 29

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By now in this series you all know the tenor of Jeremiah's prophecy. Chapter 29 continues in the same vein. But there is a well-loved verse in this chapter that we will be examining a bit closer.

¹¹ 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.

However we need to begin by knowing its context so we can rightly apply it. Chapter 29 includes two letters from Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon.

Jeremiah's First Letter to the Exiles

Read Jeremiah 29:1-7. Think about what God was saying. Babylon would eventually be destroyed. But while they were there to pray for the welfare of the city. Shouldn't we likewise be praying for the welfare of Cottage Grove, or Eugene, or Springfield, or Thurston, or Drain, or Loraine, or Culp Creek?

But there were false prophets among the exiles who didn't like Jeremiah's prophetic words. Jeremiah was encouraging the people to settle-in for a long stay in Babylon.

Read Jeremiah 29:8-9. Some of the prophets who had been taken to Babylon were evidently proclaiming the safety of Jerusalem and the swift return of the exiles. But God did not send them. Instead their stay in Babylon would be long.

¹⁰ ¶ "For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

Do you remember Daniel 9:2? Daniel had been reading this verse.

Then we have the well-loved verse.

¹¹ 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.

We'll come back to this verse. But think about this. This was not God's plan for all the exiles. These were not God's plans for either the false prophets in Babylon or for those who were still dwelling in Jerusalem. These were plans for those who were truly seeking to serve God in Babylon.

Read Jeremiah 29:12-14. Again, this harkens back to God's promise in Deuteronomy 30:1-10.

Read Jeremiah 29:15. The first word in verse 15 ("because") can also be understood as introducing an objection raised by the exiles, and can therefore rightly be translated "but." The people were hearing a very different message from some of the prophets among them. As I mentioned before (verses 8 & 9) these prophets were proclaiming the safety of Jerusalem and the swift return of those who had been taken to Babylon. But this is what would happen to these false prophets...

¹⁷ 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, behold, I am sending on them sword, famine, and pestilence, and I will make them like vile figs that are so rotten they cannot be eaten.

In chapter 24 God had given Jeremiah a vision of good figs and rotten figs. The good figs were those taken to Babylon. The rotten figs were those who remained in Jerusalem. Now God also referred to the

false prophets who were in Babylon as rotten figs. God's plans for them were the same as His plans for those in Jerusalem.

Read Jeremiah 29:18-19.

God reminded the exiles that their people as a whole had not listened to the words of the multiple prophets God had sent to them. But God had graciously put the exiles in a much better situation than those in Jerusalem. They could choose to listen to His word through Jeremiah. As a confirmation of Jeremiah's message God named two prominent false prophets who were among them and told what their end would be.

Read Jeremiah 29:20-23. The Zedekiah here is a prophet, not the king.

Bad theology goes hand in hand with bad behavior.

Jeremiah's Second Letter to the Exiles

In response to Jeremiah's first letter to the exiles a third false prophet had written to Jerusalem urging Zephaniah to punish Jeremiah. But instead Zephaniah read Shemaiah's letter to Jeremiah.

Read Jeremiah 29:24-29.

Now God had His own plans for Shemaiah.

Read Jeremiah 29:30-32.

It is a dangerous thing to put your own words in God's mouth. Now, let's go back and pick-up verse 11 again.

I mentioned that this is a well-loved verse in Jeremiah. Many people have taken it on themselves to memorize it. But is this God's promise for us? Can we claim it for ourselves? Well, the answer can be either yes or no... Yes – if we apply it rightly, No – if we don't.

1st – This verse, in the context of Jeremiah 29, did not refer to the blessings God's people would enjoy with Him in eternity. It referred to the blessing the exiles could enjoy in this life, and the future restoration of their nation.

2nd – God's plans for their welfare were not for all of the exiles. Certainly God's plan for their false prophets was for evil. What any of them would experience directly depended on their relationship with Him.

3rd – This verse does however highlight several things about the character of God.

A. His Sovereignty: God was sovereign over their lives and over their nation. God is sovereign over everything about us too.

B. His Omniscience: God knows what is best for His people much more than what we know. (Read Isaiah 55:8-9.)

C. His Faithfulness: God was faithful to His promises to Abram, Isaac, Jacob, and David. The Jewish people would not be utterly destroyed. God is faithful to all of His promises. This directly impacts us too.

D. His love: Those who rightly serve God can be assured of His care and protection through all the storms of life. (Read 2 Chronicles 16:9a.)

E. His Justice: God will judge the unrighteous.

The character of God is our bridge to the right application of this verse. Reading this verse with these things in mind will lead to its good application.

And remember, this verse is for God's people. Are you there?