

# PRESENT

## JEREMIAH 29:1-14

(Prepared by Gene Thompson using LifeWay's ETB materials.)

1. What are some key elements in building a healthy culture? (Trust in the leadership and each other. Unselfishness throughout the organization. Seeking the best for the culture and each other. Godliness in the lives of the people.)
2. How does an unhealthy culture affect an organization and those it serves? (It is hard to keep employees. The workers have a negative attitude.)

There are two eating establishments within a mile of each other here in Ardmore. The service in these two places is drastically different. I asked the owner of the one with great service how he kept such good employees. He said, "We take good care of our help." You can tell it in the attitude of the people who work there.

The same is true in a church where the people trust each other and work together for a common goal. It shows in our church's motto: "Large enough to serve you, Small enough to know you."

3. What happens when God's people choose to trust Him in all circumstances? (We have peace that God is in total control and has our best interest at heart regardless of the circumstances.)
4. How does choosing to trust God impact our life perspective? (There is nothing beyond His knowledge and control.)

Jeremiah and other prophets of God had been prophesying that Judah would be judged for their sins—and finally they were. Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon invaded the Holy Land and destroyed Jerusalem, ransacked the Temple, and took thousands of the Jews into captivity into Babylon. So, Chapter 29 opens with Jeremiah writing a letter to those who were taken captive to Babylon. (These exiles would include people like Daniel, and Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, who would be thrown into the fiery furnace. This Babylonian captivity is the context of the Book of Daniel.) The Jews would live in Babylon in captivity for 70 years and then miraculously be brought back to Jerusalem again. But at this point, Jeremiah is writing those in exile in Babylon a letter. Jeremiah 29:4 begins the letter, and his message is for them—and for us today! The date of this letter is around 597 BC.

**GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY! Read Jeremiah 29:4,7,14.**

1. How did Jeremiah begin his letter? ("This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says...") We shouldn't be surprised; we've seen this time and again over the last few weeks. These are God's words, not Jeremiah's.
2. Who does God say sent them into exile? (HE did! Not "Nebuchadnezzar," not "the Babylonian army," etc. But GOD! HE did it. He is in charge.)

We see it again in verse 7 and in verse 14. All this just makes it very clear that GOD oversees the events of our world.

We just celebrated Independence Day a couple of weeks ago. During the British attack on New York in 1776, the British defeated the American troops under George Washington on Long Island. The American army fell back to the East River, hoping to retreat across it to Manhattan. But the British Navy, which dominated the seas, could have cut them off, allowing the Army to destroy them, capture General Washington, and end the war.

But a strong wind blew from the north, preventing any movement of British warships up the East River to cut off escape by the Americans. Then, a 'peculiar providential' fog set in, so that the British could not see Washington's retreat and escape. When daylight came and the fog began to thin, the British discovered that the Americans had vanished." (David McCullough, John Adams, p. 152)

There "just so happened" to be a strong wind that kept the British navy from cutting off the American retreat across the river; there came a "providential fog" that kept the British Army from seeing that the Americans were retreating. No wonder Benjamin Franklin wrote, after seeing all the Providences

of the American Revolution: "If I had ever before been an atheist, I should now have been convinced of the Being and government of a Deity!" (Walter Isaacson, Benjamin Franklin: An American Life, P. 467)

This is just what God says here in Jeremiah: GOD IS SOVEREIGN. God is on the throne. He is in charge of events and armies today!

3. What are some things that we may need to learn to accept as God's will under His sovereignty?  
(Health/how long we live/the physical characteristics we were born with/whether we get rain or not!  
God is in charge of that!/whether we get a certain job or not.)

**God is sovereign over everything, including our lives today!**

### **THRIVE! Read Jeremiah 29:4-7**

The Babylonians just wanted to absorb these exiles in their culture and communities.

1. How do you think you would feel if you were one of these exiles, 500 miles from home, in captivity in Babylon?
2. What might some of your thoughts be? (How long will we be here? What do we do next? Will we ever go home again?)
3. What is God's surprising instruction to the exiles in these verses? (Settle down, build houses, plant gardens, marry, have children, pray for your enemies, etc.)
4. Was Jeremiah's message to settle into the land of their exile a message of doom or hope? (If we simply accept this situation as God's will for our lives for right now it is a message of hope.)

If they would follow God's instructions, they would find peace and security in the moment, along with the hope for a return to the Promised Land.

5. Why would the exiles' accepting life in Babylon be a demonstration of faith in God? (It is an act of obedience.)

The exiles were to make it a better place through their presence.

We, as Christians, should be making wherever we live a better place because of our presence.

Even in captivity, God wanted His people to thrive. So, He directed them to pray for their captors. The exiles' lives were to reflect their faith in God.

6. How can we make the communities where we live a better place? (Get involved in our community and be the "salt" and "light" God has called us to be in the world around us!

### **IGNORE! Read Jeremiah 29:8-9**

1. What are three sources of false messages here? (False prophets, diviners, and dreams!)  
Apparently, false prophets in Babylon were presuming to speak for God without having been called by God or given a message from Him. They were trying to stir the people toward a rebellion against the Babylonians.

Jeremiah emphasized that these false messages ran contrary to God's plans and purposes. He would free the people when the time was right. A revolt would have brought more disaster on the exiles. What's more, they wouldn't just be rebelling against Babylon. They would be rebelling against God.

2. Is there an application for us today? Are there any false prophets telling people what they want to hear today? (Absolutely)

There are the "prosperity preachers" who proclaim that it is God's will for everyone to be healthy and rich. Just keep saying you aren't sick, and you won't be; just "claim it" and you will have God's blessing. Just say, "I am successful" in the mirror and you will be.

Then there are those false prophets who condone sin. These are on the increase in our land, saying that same-sex marriages and relationships are blessed by God, and that you can be whatever gender that makes you happy. **This sounds good; this is what some people want to hear, but it is not the truth.**

3. How can we be certain that a person is delivering a message from God? (Does it line up with God's Word?)

God is the same, yesterday, today, and forever! His message to His people is always consistent and true!

### **HOPE! Read Jeremiah 29:10-14**

Jeremiah 29:11 is a favorite verse for many people. In the context here it is for the nation of Israel, but it can be applied to individuals as well. But it is not a promise that everything will go well in our lives. It was addressed to the exiles in Babylon who needed hope and faith, including many who would never live to see the return God promised.

For us, we can rest in the fact that even in the most difficult times we can hope in God's mercy, grace, wisdom, and goodness.

1. What evidence of God's hope do we find in these verses? (God had a plan to restore them after 70 years.)

It is interesting to note that God's people never turned to false gods again!

2. What happens when we seek God with all our heart? (We will find Him! He longs for us to seek Him!)
3. How have you seen God work out His plans in your life?
4. What impact has that had on you?
5. Why should we wait for God to work out His plan for our lives? (He has a plan, not only for our nation, but for us individually also. We really mess things up when we run ahead of Him.)
6. How should knowing that God has a plan for your life affect the way you think and live each day? (In confident assurance that God is in control, and He knows what is best for me in His grand plan for my life, even in dire circumstances!)

### **SUMMARY AND CHALLENGE!**

Jeremiah exhorted the Israelites to make the land of their exile better for having been there and to pray for their unbelieving neighbors.

1. What principles from these commands apply to believers today?
2. How can we put them into practice today?
3. Is there a situation right now that is requiring you to put your hope in God?
4. Knowing that God can bring something good out of bad situations, how should you respond to this situation?

Close in prayer, thanking God for His trustworthiness. Ask Him to help each of us to reflect His kindness, whatever our personal circumstances might be!