

Jeremiah 29: 4-14

Today we are reading from Jeremiah Chapter 29, verses 4-14. This chapter of Jeremiah is well known for verse 11, “For I know the plans I have for you.” It is one of our favorite bible verses, but often, it is taken out of context and misinterpreted. Basically, God is speaking to His people after they have made a real mess of things. He has allowed punishment to fall on His people and He has given them a long period of correction, an exile of 70 years, before He will let them return home. An extended “time out” if you will, time to reflect and time to rebuild. They are no longer in the promised land. But God has used this season of correction to refine His people, and this punishment is intended to help them change their hearts. He is also giving them practical suggestions for how to grow, and how to overcome during this time.

We all make mistakes, feel the sting of sin, and sometimes we veer so far off course that we too, have to start over. We may feel fear, shame, regret, and apprehension. We may wonder what other challenges are ahead.

The exiled people of Judah wanted to return to Israel as quickly as possible, but they would have to wait. God instructs them how to wait and how to rebuild. He reassures them that He has plans for them beyond this difficult season. He also has plans for us when trouble comes.

So, let's turn to Jeremiah 4: 4-14.

Jeremiah 4: 4-14

⁴ This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷ Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” ⁸ Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. ⁹ They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,” declares the Lord.

¹⁰ This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”

This letter reflects a community who has lost everything: their loved ones, their homes, their beloved city Jerusalem, their language, and culture, in addition to the familiar expressions of their religion connected to the temple that had been destroyed. Jeremiah told them to settle down and pray for the welfare of their current place of residence. This place, this time, was God’s best for them now and this discipline was a part of the good plans He had for their future restoration.

How do you put the pieces back together? One of the greatest gifts we have is the routine of our blessed, daily lives. In the US, we live in rich abundance most of the time. We have more than so many in the world. The known stability and security in life are gifts. God has made that possible for us. An ordinary day is a gift. It is not dull, nor is it indicative of being boring or in a rut; it is precious. When we face disappointments, mistakes and hardships, there is one thing we can know for certain—God’s plans for us are always good. Only God knows the future. Only He has knows the plan for us.

He gives us instruction about what to do. How do we rebuild? We confess and repent. We can clear one path and then another and another. We can sort out our blessings from the rubble. We can discard from our lives what needs to be discarded. We can find the new ordinary day and set up a routine again. Ordinary day activities express the comfort of home, the blessing of having enough food to eat and they gladden the heart. There is joy in the return of when the world feels normal. This is evident with the reference to wedding celebrations. There is hope for the future, at home and in the community. The verses 4-7 focus us on the activities that signal a return to normal — building houses, planting vineyards, celebrating weddings. Rebuilding normal also serves as a powerful testimony to the power of resilience.

The human activity of surviving and starting to live again is framed by God's action of fulfilling promises, He is going to bring back the exiles to their own land in HIS time, He is providing them with a hope-filled future. God continues to be involved with the people even in the far-away land of Babylon. God's presence is felt even in exile in Babylon. He allows the people to find Him and leads them back to His side. (Jeremiah 29:14).

He makes promises that we can count on:

I will bring you Home again

I will listen to you

You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all of your hearts

I have plans for you. What is to come, will come, but right now, in this season of waiting, draw close to me. He will also move closer to us in return.

Our hope is for the future

Despair can move us away, but it can also draw us closer to God. He finds us in our fear; He tells us to keep going and gives us His peace. He lights our path.

We need hope to carry us out of exile and into the presence of God

So chose faith over fear

Chose love instead of self-pity

Chose Him and always trust in His plan. Hear HIS voice.

If we want to discover the Lord's best for our life, we must trust that His way is better than our way and His timing is better than our timing. He expects us to follow Him. Our heavenly Father sees what lies ahead and knows what He wants to accomplish in every situation of our life.

By spending time regularly in His Word, we will find our trust in Him growing deeper as we learn more about His ways and plans.

Let's pray

Abba, Holy Father, You are Our King,

Thank you for Your guidance and Your correction. Thank You for Your patience. For providing a way out of the mess we make when we make mistakes. Thank You for every ordinary day. For family, food, work, and wisdom. Let us read Your word and understand, let the Word guide us through any difficult circumstance. We may feel we

are in a valley or in exile, but You are at our side. In our struggles, we ask You to help us to choose love, steadiness, faith, and hope as we wait for You to move.

We can love because You first loved us. We can trust in You and Your plan; Your plans are good. Use all our struggles to guide us closer to you and forgive us for our weakness and sin. Forgive us for losing patience or hope. Forgive us for our sin.

Strengthen our resolve to endure and to wait for You to move.

Your blessings are so abundant. We love you, Father.

Amen.