

Jeremiah 29

The Law vs Spiritual Living

Read Jeremiah 29:1-7: Now Jeremiah sends a letter from Jerusalem to the captives in Babylon. All of his prophecies up to this point were to his people living with him in Jerusalem. Other prophets were known to share or prophecy to the captives in Babylon. It is interesting how spiritual prophecy became to the exiles. Jeremiah had been reiterating a *turn-or-burn* message to those remaining in Jerusalem. The prophecies to the exiles were very deep and very spiritual. Jerusalem was just full of death and despair, while Babylon was flourishing. It was like the opening line in The Tale of Two Cities: *It was the best of times; and it was the worst of times.*

A lot of spiritual things can happen in dark places. Daniel received prophecy while he was a captive in Babylon. Ezekiel prophesied to captivity in Babylon.

The message is completely different to what the folks back home were getting. Jeremiah talked about having families, being good citizens abroad, getting married and enjoying their new lives. It is an entirely different scene and seems counterintuitive to being held captive. That's what happens when you give God's plan a chance.

In a sense, we are also living abroad. We are told to be good citizens in this pagan culture. It was a fresh start.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20)

Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. (Colossians 4:5-6)

God compared Nebuchadnezzar picking off the top leaders in Judah to be re-planted in Babylon to a story about an eagle and a cedar.

"A great eagle with large wings and long pinions, Full of feathers of various colors, Came to Lebanon And took from the cedar the highest branch. He cropped off its topmost young twig And carried it to a land of trade; He set it in a city of merchants. Then he took some of the seed of the land And planted it in a fertile field; He placed it by abundant waters And set it like a willow tree. And it grew and became a spreading vine of low stature; Its branches turned toward him, But its roots were under it. So it became a vine, brought forth branches, and put forth shoots. (Ezekiel 17: 4-8)

Which group would you like to be in? The fresh start, or with those who are hanging onto the old ways in Jerusalem? Pilgrim's Progress is written about a believer fleeing the City of Destruction, and beginning on a spiritual journey. There is nothing in our rear view mirror worth going back to.

Those slain by the sword are better off Than those who die of hunger; For these pine away, Stricken for lack of the fruits of the field. The hands of the compassionate women Have cooked their own children; They became food for them In the destruction of the daughter of my people. The LORD has fulfilled His fury, he has poured out His fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion, And it has devoured its foundations. (Lamentations 4:9-11)

God moved these people to a prosperous place; not to a place of torture. He set them up to thrive. The people who were left behind were resisting this land of opportunity. Sometimes we are afraid of what God is moving us towards. I have found that it is easier to re-define yourself and start over when you move.

Are we redeeming the time amidst an unbelieving culture? Are we walking in the Spirit; or clinging to what we have always done? Are we living like foreigners in this pop culture landscape?

Daniel made the most of his opportunity. Daniel did read what Jeremiah published:

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans— in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. (Daniel 9:1-2)

behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' says the LORD, 'and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 'Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,' says the LORD; 'and I will make it a perpetual desolation. (Jeremiah 25: 9-12)

Read Jeremiah 29:8-14: Satan was selling the shortcut idea. Hananiah the false prophet was telling everyone that they should not go to Babylon. He told them to fight the notion of deportation. Most of those people who ignored Jeremiah died. Those who listened to the false prophet were killed. Those who moved to Babylon prospered. The homeland would never have been nice to come back to if the people were not removed, along with their idolatry.

Something very strange happened to the exiles. They repented; while those who were left behind did not. Jeremiah talked about the early pick good figs and the overripe rotten figs. It was like absence making the heart grow fonder.

By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps Upon the willows in the midst of it. For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, And those who plundered us requested mirth, Saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How shall we sing the LORD's song In a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not

*remember you, Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth— If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy.
(Psalm 137)*

Read Jeremiah 29:15-23: God clarifies what will happen to the residents of Jerusalem who refused to listen to the prophets and go to Babylon. They will be killed by the sword, they will starve to death, they will have fatal epidemics, and nothing but trouble from here on out. They will be cursed people no matter what country they go to. Their king will be roasted with fire. Those who stayed behind actually became more sinful than the Canaanites they drove out. Ezekiel lays out the percentages. 1/3 will be killed in Jerusalem by the sword. 1/3 will die of death and disease in Jerusalem. The final third will run away to other nations and be hunted down.

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Because you have multiplied disobedience more than the nations that are all around you, have not walked in My statutes nor kept My judgments, nor even done according to the judgments of the nations that are all around you’— therefore thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Indeed I, even I, am against you and will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations. And I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again, because of all your abominations. Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments among you, and all of you who remain I will scatter to all the winds. ‘Therefore, as I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will also diminish you; My eye will not spare, nor will I have any pity. One-third of you shall die of the pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst; and one-third shall fall by the sword all around you; and I will scatter another third to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them. (Ezekiel 5)

Read Jeremiah 29:24-32: Now God is disconnecting the remaining false prophets and false priests from his people in Babylon.