



**70 years, ah man!** • *Jeremiah 29:1-19*

Pastor Kenneth Spiller • February 12, 2023

## **BIG IDEA: Future blessing does not negate present pain. Present pain does not negate future blessing.**

T-Shirt Theology is a phrase we're using to refer to those verses that sound good and meaningful, but are often taken out of context – and therefore being used to mean things they don't actually mean. Our T-shirt Theology verse for today is Jeremiah 29:11, which says: **"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.'"**

### **➔ When and where have you heard and seen Jeremiah 29:11 quoted?**

Christians frequently quote this beautiful verse, yet many don't know who God is speaking to or why He's saying these words. When hard things happen and we rely on this verse, we go from hoping and trusting in God to wondering why God would let us down. When we are jobless, when marriages end, when children rebel, or when we get a bad report from the doctor, we may wonder what happened to the prosperous plans and the hopeful future we hear referenced in this verse. We may even begin to question why God would let us down or if His word can even be trusted. This is precisely why T-Shirt Theology is dangerous.

[Jeremiah 29:11 is] possibly one of our most beloved, yet most misunderstood, verses in the entire Bible.

-Thomas Turner,  
Relevant Magazine

In interpreting Scripture, we must balance:

1. Knowing that God can and does speak through His word and can speak through anything –

circumstances, struggles, people, sin, a whirlwind, etc.

2. Doing our due diligence to discover the context of a verse and its meaning for the original audience.

We need this balance of God's inspiration and understanding of the context because **incorrect interpretation leads to incorrect understanding, which leads to incorrect application.**

➔ **What are some ways you can practice due diligence in Bible study?**

➔ **We know that God can speak through anyone and anything. Tell about a time you clearly heard the voice of God.**

If we want to know what Jeremiah 29:11 means for *us*, we need to understand what Jeremiah 29:11 meant for *them* – the original audience.

**“This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.” -Jeremiah 29:1**

From Jeremiah 29:1, we discover that Jeremiah wrote these words when Israel was in captivity in Babylon. God had repeatedly warned the people of Israel that if they turned from Him, it would be to their detriment. He even told them other nations would conquer them if they turned from Him – and still they turned away.

**Future blessing does not negate present pain. Present pain does not negate future blessings.** The pain of today doesn't mean there won't be blessing tomorrow. On the other side, just because there's blessing today, doesn't mean there won't be pain tomorrow.

There are consequences for our sins in this world.

Simply thinking and believing that God will deliver us from the consequences of wrong choices is T-Shirt Theology. The Israelites could believe whatever they wanted, but the consequences of their choices remained. They had to repent, trust, pray, and seek after God.

You can't *believe* your way out of something you *behaved* your way into.

-Pastor Allen Parr

➔ **Pastor Kenneth told a story about a family trip to Carlsbad**

**Caverns and the consequences he faced for not following the directions on a sign. Has there been a time in your life when you've known the right thing to do, but chosen to go in the wrong direction?**

➔ **Have you ever heard God instructing you in one direction and still chosen to do your own thing? What were the consequences of this behavior?**

God has four messages for the Israelites in this passage that we can also apply to our current context.

## 1. Get comfortable: you're going to be here for a while. *(Jeremiah 29:5-7)*

Jeremiah tells the people to settle down, marry, and seek the prosperity of the cities where they have been taken captive. Why? Because as the city prospers, so will they. God is saying that the people of Israel are to bless their captors. Why? Well, they're going to be there for a while. They may hope and pray that they return to their lands, but God tells them they're not going back for a long time. In fact, later in this chapter, God tells them they'll be in captivity for 70 years. God sometimes asks us to bless people even in the midst of circumstances we don't appreciate.

➔ **When is a time God asked you to bless someone in the midst of circumstances you didn't appreciate? What did you feel like after you did?**

## 2. Watch out: there are false prophets out there. *(Jeremiah 29:8-9)*

Jeremiah warns the people that there are deceivers out there. One such false prophet was a man named Hananiah. In Jeremiah 28:1-4, he prophesied in the name of the Lord that God would free the people from Babylon within two years and that they would get all their stolen treasures back. The trouble is, God never said that. Hananiah was a false prophet. At the end of Jeremiah 29, there is another false prophet named Shemaiah. He said Jeremiah was crazy and should be put in jail for advising the people to settle down in captivity. These prophets' words may have sounded appealing, but they weren't true.

Then the Lord says: **"Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have ..."** (verse 8) and then says **"They are prophesying lies in my name."** (verse 9). In other words, these false prophets say what the people wanted them to say. Pastor Kenneth shared about followers of James Arthur Ray, a spiritual guru who led his followers in a journey which resulted in the death for some, illness for others, and a prison sentence for James Arthur Ray.

➔ **Have you ever told someone what they wanted to hear just to keep them happy, to offer encouragement, or because you were afraid of their response to the truth?**

➔ **Has someone ever done this to you?**

## 3. Seek God: God wants to be found. *(Jeremiah 29:10-13)*

Israel will be captive for 70 years! What are they supposed to do while they wait? They were to pray and seek the Lord — and the promise is that they will find God if they search for Him with all their hearts. Then, after 70 years, God will bring them out of captivity. True to His word, after 70 years,

God brought the Israelites back to their homeland. **Future blessing does not negate present pain. Present pain does not negate future blessing.**

➔ **How are you seeking after God? Do you seek with thanksgiving?**

➔ **How are you creating space to listen to God?**

#### **4. Listen better: Learn from your past.** *(Jeremiah 29:15-20)*

The rest of Jeremiah 29 still has more bad news. Not only will the Jewish people be in exile for 70 years, but the people who were left behind back in Jerusalem will also suffer the **“sword, famine and plague”** (verses 17-18). They will suffer from hunger, oppression, and disease. Why? Verse 19 answers that: **“For they have not listened to my words,’ declares the Lord, ‘words that I sent to them again and again by my servants the prophets. And you exiles have not listened either,’ declares the Lord.”** The Lord says the people are being punished because of their sin and because they have not listened.

➔ **What is something you have learned in the past that helps you today?**

➔ **How can you become better at listening to God?**

Jeremiah 29:11 is not about you getting your way, or you getting things you want, or hoping things will work out in your favor. It’s about God getting His way and His plans coming to pass. Once we understand the context, the truth of Jeremiah 29:11 is even greater than the T-Shirt Theology version. Life can be really difficult, but God is still in control even in that difficulty. You may not have the life you want or the things you want in this life, but you can still have a God-led life. A God-led life is worth more than anything else. **Future blessing does not negate present pain. Present pain does not negate future blessings.**

Pastor Kenneth shared part of one of our member’s stories. Then he shared that her response and stated this response is what Jeremiah 29:11 means for each of us.

As you look to apply this message this week, consider what it would look like to fully surrender your life over to Christ. If you have a favorite Bible verse, spend time reading it in context in the days ahead.

My plan is to charge ahead bravely, try to learn lessons throughout, and to glorify God through it all.

*-Parkgate Member*