



For Hillsboro and South Hillsboro - Week One

For the City

Jeremiah 29:1-14

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. ² (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) ³ He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said:

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.”

Jeremiah 29:1-14

contains a letter from the prophet Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon, assuring them of God's plans for their future. The key points include:

- **God's Promise:** *"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope"*
(Jeremiah 29:11)

Jeremiah's letter to the exiles contains one of the most widely recognized verses in the Old Testament:

For surely I know the plans I have for you [plural], says the LORD, plans for your [plural] welfare and not for harm, to give you [plural] a future with hope.
(Jeremiah 29:11)

This verse, emblazoned on coffee mugs, jewelry, graduation cards, and journals, has provided comfort to countless readers of the Bible. Its beauty is undeniable, and these words are certainly deserving of thoughtful attention.

It may be tempting to roll our eyes at the commercialized interpretations of this text or dismiss the "simplistic" and "uninformed" readings that often ignore its context. But condescension does little to lift weary hearts or honor the genuine solace this verse has offered.

Rather than offering a corrective to these popular interpretations, consider exploring a different set of questions: What is the shape of the hope this verse offers? How is it determined by the realities of human anguish and resilience? In what ways might we find ourselves in need of a similar hope in our own time?

The hopeful fruit this verse yields is a product of being deeply rooted in the collective trauma experienced by the exiled Jewish community. It's a word given to "you all" (plural) and not just to "you" (singular). The letter opens by addressing its audience directly: "to the remaining elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon" (29:1). This anchoring in a concrete historical moment underscores the shared struggle and hope of those who first received Jeremiah's words.

It is crucial to dig deeper into the composition of Jeremiah's audience, described specifically as "elders," "priests," and "prophets." More often than not, the bearers of these titles were fiercely criticized by Jeremiah, who held them responsible for the violent events that led to the exile of many Jews to Mesopotamia (see, for example, 1:18; 2:8, 26; 4:9; 5:31; 6:13; 8:1, 10; 13:13; 14:18; 18:18).

The fact that Jeremiah continues to address these groups—despite their vociferous and sometimes violent opposition to his ministry—demonstrates the prophet’s commitment to his message. In contrast to the first part of the book, which emphasizes judgment, Jeremiah’s message in chapter 29, and even more so in chapters 30–33, depicts him also as a prophet of hope.

What we see in Jeremiah 29 captures the spirit of Leviticus 19:18, a text that was deeply important to Jesus’ own understanding of Jewish law: *“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”*

But what was the shape of the hope that Jeremiah promised? It has several characteristics: It was delayed and multigenerational in scope; it was a collective hope of return to Judah; it shaped everyday life; it was contested by other prophets.

The Jewish community in Babylon was called to endure a season of exile: “For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon’s seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place” (verse 10). Jeremiah’s hope was set against a long, multigenerational horizon. It was **a hope** that would be realized by future generations, not those who first heard the letter. The initial hearers would not ultimately be the beneficiaries.

“Hope” is often understood simply as wishful thinking: I hope we get a lot of rain this year. I hope things work out. I hope things go our way. **But for Jeremiah, hope shapes action.**

Instead of trying to manufacture a speedy return to Judah (verse 8), Jeremiah calls upon his audience to exercise active, hopeful patience by putting down roots, building lives, and even working for the prosperity of their conqueror: *“Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare”* (verses 6–7).

Jeremiah’s words challenge the exiles not just to hold onto hope but to act upon it through practical, everyday actions: build, live, plant, eat, marry, give, bear, multiply, seek, and pray. These dynamic verbs call for active engagement with the world around them, even in the unfamiliar and often hostile environment of Babylon. Hope, in Jeremiah’s vision, is not passive or abstract—it is lived out in the rhythms of daily life.

This message carries a profound and unsettling theological claim: The exiles' well-being is inseparably bound to the well-being of Babylon. Jeremiah urges them to move beyond despair or detachment, reframing their situation as an opportunity to cultivate community, foster prosperity, and work for the common good. By encouraging them to invest in relationships, nurture families, and build meaningful lives, even in exile, Jeremiah redefines hope as a transformative act of faith. It is hope that resists resignation and takes root in the belief that flourishing is possible—even in unlikely places.

Jeremiah's message is hopeful and hard. How could one possibly work for the good of those who had destroyed their way of life, perhaps even taken the lives of their loved ones? Goodwill is difficult enough under ordinary circumstances, let alone in the aftermath of war.

Jeremiah was not the only voice seeking the trust of the exiles and promoting a vision for their future. He warned them explicitly: *"Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that you dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the LORD"* (verses 8–9). These words suggest that alternative visions of Judah's future were actively circulating, vying for influence among the exiles.

This contest over the future is hardly surprising. Our vision of what lies ahead profoundly shapes the choices we make—or don't make—in the present: It influences whom we choose to trust, how we allocate our resources, and what commands our attention and imagination. The future, in this sense, is not a neutral space—it is deeply contested, because the story we believe about tomorrow determines how we engage with today.

Jeremiah's missive is an important witness to the exilic faith of ancient Jews. But it also offers gifts to modern readers. It serves as a poignant reminder to preachers and teachers of our calling to nurture the horizons of human hope. Human beings make decisions based on where we believe we are going, what we believe will happen in the future, and whom we imagine accompanying us into that future.

- **Instructions for Exiles:** The exiles are encouraged to build homes, plant gardens, and seek the welfare of the city where they live, as their well-being is tied to the city's well-being.

The scene in Jeremiah 29:1-14 takes place in the city of Jerusalem during the time when the Israelites were in exile in Babylon. The main characters in this scene are the prophet Jeremiah and the exiled Israelites. Jeremiah had been called by God to deliver a message to the Israelites who were living in captivity, urging them to settle down in Babylon, build homes, plant gardens, and seek the welfare of the city where they had been taken.

The Israelites had been taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon as a result of their disobedience to God. They were living in a foreign land, longing for their homeland and feeling disconnected from their faith and traditions. Jeremiah's message was a reminder that even in exile, they were still God's chosen people and that they should not lose hope. He encouraged them to seek God with all their hearts and promised that if they did so, they would find Him and eventually be restored to their land.

The surroundings in this scene would have been a mix of despair and hope. The Israelites would have been living in a state of uncertainty and longing for their homeland, while Jeremiah's message would have brought them a glimmer of hope and a sense of purpose in their current situation. Jeremiah's words would have provided them with a roadmap for how to navigate their exile and maintain their faith in God despite their circumstances.

Imagine for a moment being in a period of uncertainty or difficulty. Jeremiah 29:1-14 serves as a powerful reminder that even in the midst of challenges, we are encouraged to seek God wholeheartedly. This passage highlights the significance of turning to God in times of need by emphasizing the importance of seeking Him with all your heart, finding comfort, guidance, and hope in His presence. Students struggle with assignments or face personal obstacles. Just like in the verse, we guide them to seek help and support with all their effort. We remind them that through seeking God or seeking assistance, they can find the strength and solutions needed to overcome their challenges. This biblical teaching not only provides comfort and reassurance but also encourages us to trust in God's plans for our lives and to hold onto hope, knowing that He has a purpose and a future for each one of us.

Jeremiah 29:1-14 presents a poignant letter from the prophet Jeremiah to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, ***offering them guidance and hope in the midst of their despair.***

The Israelites, taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar, were grappling with uncertainty about their future. In this context, the key phrase, “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,” stands out as a beacon of reassurance. It underscores God’s intentional and benevolent plans for His people, emphasizing His sovereignty even in times of suffering.

Moreover, the passage highlights the significance of prayer and seeking God wholeheartedly. “Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you,” underscores the importance of reaching out to God in prayer, knowing that He listens to His people. Similarly, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart,” encourages a deep, sincere pursuit of God, assuring that He is accessible to those who earnestly seek Him.

Drawing parallels, Romans 8:28 echoes the theme of God working for the good of those who love Him, resonating with the idea of God’s redemptive plans in challenging circumstances. *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Proverbs 3:5-6 further reinforces the concept of trusting in God’s plan and submitting to His guidance, emphasizing the importance of faith and reliance on God’s wisdom.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight

The relevance of Jeremiah 29:1-14 extends to contemporary struggles, offering hope and assurance to individuals facing uncertainty and challenges. Like the exiles in Babylon, many today struggle with periods of waiting and doubt. This passage serves as a reminder that God has a purposeful plan for each person’s life, urging them to remain faithful, seek God earnestly, and trust in His timing and purpose.

Illustratively, the anecdote of a young woman losing her job mirrors the uncertainties many face. Clinging to the promise in Jeremiah 29:11, she found solace in God’s plan, eventually discovering new opportunities that aligned with her skills and allowed her to serve meaningfully. Her story reflects the transformative power of trusting in God’s promises during times of uncertainty.

In conclusion, Jeremiah 29:1-14 resonates as a testament to God’s faithfulness and His redemptive plans for His people. It calls individuals to trust in God’s

sovereignty, seek Him wholeheartedly, and hold onto hope in challenging times. By embracing these truths, one can find peace and assurance in God's guiding hand, leading them towards a future filled with hope and purpose.

What does seeking God with all our hearts entail?

Seeking God with all our hearts means wholeheartedly pursuing Him with genuine desire and sincerity. It involves actively seeking Him through prayer, meditation on His Word, worship, and obedience to His commands. This kind of seeking requires a deep commitment and dedication, putting God first in our lives and aligning our will with His. It is a relentless pursuit of intimacy with God, seeking to know Him more deeply and experience His presence in our lives.

When we seek God with all our hearts, we surrender our own plans and desires to His will, acknowledging His sovereignty and trusting in His plans for us. It involves seeking His wisdom, guidance, and direction in all aspects of our lives, constantly seeking to align our thoughts, actions, and desires with His perfect will. We demonstrate our love for God and our reliance on His strength and grace to lead us on the path of righteousness and fulfill His purposes for our lives by seeking Him wholeheartedly.

- **Call to Prayer:** They are urged to pray for the city, as their prayers will contribute to their own peace and prosperity.

The concept of a call to prayer is deeply rooted in the Bible, where prayer is depicted as both a divine invitation and a commanded duty. Throughout scripture, figures such as Abraham, Moses, and David exemplify lives steeped in prayer. For instance, Genesis 4:26 notes, *"At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD,"* indicating the early establishment of prayer as a means of seeking divine presence and intervention. The Psalms, often referred to as the prayer book of the Bible, are filled with calls to prayer, such as Psalm 50:15, which states, *"Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor Me".*

Serving God Right Where You Are

Serving God right where you are involves recognizing your place in life and being dedicated to your role. It is about being faithful in your daily life, whether at home, work, or in your community. Here are some ways to serve God where you live:

- **Develop a consistent prayer life:** Engage in prayer regularly, sharing your heart and seeking God's guidance.
- **Serve others with genuine love:** Show kindness and compassion to those around you, reflecting God's love in your actions.
- **Participate in community service:** Get involved in local ministries, charities, or volunteer opportunities to help those in need.
- **Practice humility and humility of heart:** Approach each act of service with a humble heart, trusting in God's plan for your life.
- **Follow the example of Jesus:** Live out your faith by serving others, especially those who are marginalized or neglected by society.

By incorporating these practices into your daily life, you can serve God faithfully and make a positive impact in the world around you. Remember, serving God is not just about attending church or reading the Bible; it involves how you live your life and treat others.

The concept of serving faithfully where one is placed is deeply rooted in biblical teachings and is a recurring theme throughout Scripture. This principle emphasizes the importance of dedication, stewardship, and commitment to God's calling, regardless of one's circumstances or position in life.

Biblical Foundation

The Bible provides numerous examples and teachings that highlight the importance of serving faithfully. One of the most notable passages is found in Colossians 3:23-24 : *"Whatever you do, work at it with your whole being, for the Lord and not for men, because you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as your reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."* This passage underscores the idea that all work should be done as an act of service to God, not merely to please human authorities.

In the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), Jesus illustrates the importance of being faithful with what one has been given. The servants who diligently invest and multiply their master's resources are commended, while the one who buries his talent out of fear is rebuked. This parable teaches that faithfulness in small things leads to greater responsibilities and blessings.

Old Testament Examples

The Old Testament provides numerous examples of individuals who served faithfully in their respective roles. Joseph, for instance, remained faithful to God despite being sold into slavery and unjustly imprisoned. His unwavering commitment eventually led to his rise as a powerful leader in Egypt (Genesis 37-50).

Similarly, Daniel served faithfully in the courts of Babylon, maintaining his devotion to God even when faced with persecution. His integrity and dedication earned him favor and influence, as seen in Daniel 6:4-5 : *"Thus the administrators and satraps sought a charge against Daniel regarding the kingdom, but they could find no charge or corruption, because he was trustworthy, and no negligence or*

corruption was found in him."

New Testament Teachings

The New Testament continues this theme, encouraging believers to serve faithfully in their various roles. In [1 Corinthians 7:17](#), Paul advises, ***"Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches."*** This instruction highlights the importance of recognizing and embracing one's current situation as a divine appointment.

The Apostle Peter also exhorts believers to use their gifts to serve others, as seen in [1 Peter 4:10](#): ***"As good stewards of the manifold grace of God, each of you should use whatever gift he has received to serve one another."*** This passage emphasizes the diversity of gifts within the body of Christ and the call to use them faithfully for the benefit of others.

Practical Application

Serving faithfully where one is involves a heart attitude of humility, diligence, and trust in God's sovereignty. It requires recognizing that every role, whether prominent or seemingly insignificant, is an opportunity to glorify God. Believers are called to be salt and light in the world ([Matthew 5:13-16](#)), reflecting Christ's love and truth in their daily interactions and responsibilities.

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot."

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

The principle of serving faithfully also extends to the local church and community. In [Ephesians 4:11-12](#), Paul writes, "And it was He who gave some to be apostles,

some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for works of ministry and to build up the body of Christ." This passage highlights the importance of each member contributing to the growth and edification of the church through faithful service.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Some Final Thoughts – 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

¹⁷ Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. ¹⁸ Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. ¹⁹ Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts. ²⁰ Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

²¹ Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. ²² For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave. ²³ You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings. ²⁴ Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

In summary, the biblical call to serve faithfully where one is placed is a timeless principle that encourages believers to honor God through their work, relationships, and stewardship of resources. It is a reminder that every act of service, no matter how small, is significant in the eyes of the Lord.