

Pillar Passages – Jeremiah 29
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We are our next edition of Pillar Passages. Today we are in Jeremiah 29. One of *the* Pillar Passages in the Bible. For a couple of the passages in particular that people throughout the centuries have taken great comfort in. Rightly so. We want to see those in their context today. There really is one big lesson, one big encouragement for all of us in this passage. So, let's look at it together.

The timing of this, it's about 600 BC. Jeremiah, as you well know, was a prophet to Judah. He was prophesying repentance. Repentance to the people and repentance also, particularly, to the king, Jeconiah, and his court—telling them to repent. We looked at this back in chapter 24, but we have seen it in the intervening chapters as well. Repent, or else you will be taken from your land. You will be taken from your place.

Now, at this point, the exile has occurred. Just as a send note, I'm reminded here just what a shock it must have been, how traumatic it must have been, for the people. When they saw Jeconiah, the king, the queen mother, and the eunuchs, and all of his court from Jerusalem, how traumatic that must have been when it finally happened.

Jeremiah had been preaching this. The prophets before him had been preaching this. If they did not repent, they would lose their place in the Promised Land. Now the Babylonians finally escort them, under armed guard, and when they finally left what a traumatic thing that must have been.

Jeremiah, apparently, must have been taken into exile too by this time. Now, he writes a letter of all of Judah—both those who are exiled in Babylon, but also to the caretaker king, King Zedekiah, who had been left behind in Jerusalem. Zedekiah receives the letter and promptly sends this portion of it to Babylon.

The letter reads; "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent in to exile from Jerusalem to Babylon," He says this. "Build house," verse 5, "and live in them; plant gardens and eat their 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 in to exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare—*its* welfare—you will find your welfare."

Now, why does Jeremiah say this? Well, because there were, verse 8, there were prophets and false teachers among them who wanted to deceive them. So, Jeremiah says, don't listen to their dreams that they dream, "for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in My name, I did not send them, declares the Lord."

What were they preaching? They were preaching, ‘Well hey, you aren’t really going to be here for that long. Don’t worry about it, just hang tight, you’ll be back in no time.’

But the word of the Lord says, in verse 10, When the seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you.” Now most of the time in Scripture, when God visits someone, it is for terrible reasons, but in this case, God will visit them, and He will visit them for good. He will fulfill His promise to them, and He will bring them back to the holy place. To the place of the temple, Jerusalem.

And here is the wonderful quote that some many have taken encouragement from over the centuries. “For I know the plans I have for you.” I know them, God says. Plans for your welfare, not for evil. To give you a future and a hope. So, when you see this—when you see Me fulfilling that promise, then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me and I will hear you.

God has good plans for them. Plans for their welfare and not for evil. This is a promise they need to hold on to, because they cannot see it right now. They are in exile, among their enemies, in Babylon. But when God brings His deliverance, He will not only bring a physical deliverance, but He will bring a change of their hearts. A chance such that they will seek Him, as they always should have been. They will seek Him, and they will find Him when they seek Him with all their heart, verse 13. God will be found by them. He will restore the fortunes and gather them from all the nations and all the places where He has driven them. He will bring them back to the place to which He sent them in the first place.

God had brought something terrible—terribly destructive upon them. But that’s not the end of the story. God is still doing good. He is still working *for* their welfare and not for evil. They can’t see this right now, so they need to believe it. They need to believe that in the present and they need to believe in this future promise that He *will* bring the back. That is how they are to live now, and it is by belief in *that* promise that they would then have the grace, the strength to live properly while the sojourned in a foreign land.

Jeremiah is telling them to settle in. Don’t withhold from normal life. Instead, seek the welfare of the city in which you are found. In the meantime, listen to God. Listen to Him. Do not listen to the dreams of false teachers. Listen to the promises of God.

The main point here is really to let God’s reshaping work happen during their exile. Let God’s reshaping work happen there. As John Piper would say, “Don’t waste your exile.” Hunker down, knowing that God is still doing good in it.

God is still, verse 10-14, up to very good things. To bring them back to the Promised Land, verse 12, to change their hearts, because God has very specific plans to give them a future and a hope. God will restore their fortunes. He will bring them back.

Notice what God says here. In verse 11, I *know* the plans I have for you. The language here is very interesting. He's saying, I've not forgotten my plans, nor am I failing in the execution of My plans. I am neither forgetful nor failing. In fact, I'm finishing My good work in you. I started a good work in the exile, and I will finish it.

A side note here, but it leads back to the main point, why 70 years? Why would the exile be 70 years? I think, in part, it would ensure that one generation would indeed die in exile in Babylon. And, so very well, would another. Largely that next generation would live its entire life in Babylon. They would be born. They would be raised up. They would live most of their whole lives in Babylon. It would be their children—the grandchildren of the exiles—largely, who would be returning. So the promises given here would need to be believed completely by that first generation and then passed on to the next generation, who would need to pass it on to that grandchild generation. To believe in the promises of God. In this way, God resets His people. He's resetting them to walk by faith. Faith in His promises. Which is how they were always supposed to live. How God's people are always supposed to live. To live by faith in His promises.

One more comment on this before we get to those who were left behind in Jerusalem. This is especially true for those of you who are watching this, or listening to this, right now, and you have just experienced some traumatic setback in your life, perhaps. Some traumatic news. Perhaps it's traumatic health news or traumatic health experience. You may think to yourself, perhaps in the moments of silence as you sit in the hospital or by yourself at home, that perhaps God has forgotten His plans for you. That for you, somehow, He is failing in the execution of His plans. This is the battlefield of faith—especially for you, for all of us, but especially for you. That in those quiet moments, the fight of faith is the fight to believe in these promises.

God always know the plans He has for His people. Plans for *your* welfare. For you individually, and not for evil. To give *you* a future and a hope. And to remember that God intends to do some good in you that would transform you in your own heart. He's not punishing you. He's doing something whereby you will hear His voice even more clearly and even more authentically, more fully in your life. You seek Him. And if you do, you will find Him. You will. God means for you, especially in these days, to fight to believe *that* promise. And to live on that promise as if it were your very food these days.

We now move on to verse 15-19. Here Jeremiah reminds the exiles that the elite—the elite people who got to stay behind in Jerusalem—they may seem privileged. The king who sits on the throne of David, Zedekiah, the caretaker king who got to stay behind, who didn't have to go into exile. But God says, "Behold I am sending upon *them* sword, famine, and pestilence, and I will make them like vile figs that are so rotten they cannot be eaten." You may remember from the video from chapter 24, when he was saying those left behind in Jerusalem, seem like they are the privileged ones who got out of the real suffering. Perhaps if you are suffering today, you might look around at other people and say, "They have the easy life. They are the ones who are privileged. I wish I had what they have. I wish I had their health. I wish I had their peace."

Why does God do this? Well, God is bringing this pursuit with the sword and famine and pestilence and make them a reproach. Why? “Because they did not pay attention to my words, declares the Lord, that I persistently sent to my servants.” They would not listen. There is no place of elite privilege that can escape God’s very close hand. That person, no matter how privileged they are, no matter how elite they are, if they do not attend to God’s word, if they do not pay attention. We can do this the hard way, which turns out to not be burdensome at all—Matthew 18. Or we can do this the very hard way, God is saying. So it may very well be that what God is doing is God is putting grace upon you in your struggle and in your trial right now. Just like He was putting grace onto the people who went off into exile. Because by going off into exile, they would actually miss out on the sword, famine, and the pestilence. God is actually keeping His remnant by sending them—traumatically so—by sending them off into exile. He will nurture them there and raise up a new generation and who will return. A generation upon who He will send His grace.

Now in verse 20-22, the focus turns to the false prophets. False prophets always preach in accordance with their immorality. We see this in verse 20-23. These prophets who were let behind because they had done an outrageous thing. They have committed adultery with their neighbors’ wives. They have spoken in God’s name lying words. God sees this. They think God is far off, but He sees, and He is a witness, and He exposes it now.

Now, lastly, we come to Shemaiah’s false prophecy. Shemaiah is a prophet, and he says to Jeremiah, that Jeremiah has sent letter to all the people, and he begins to mock the very words that we just read a minute ago. How God would send them off into exile and how they should hunker down. They should stay there for a long time. Shemaiah is actually mocking Jeremiah for giving some of the most instructive and grace filled words that any prophet has ever spoken. Words that Christians throughout the centuries have read and taken comfort from. Here is one of the high points of this grief-filled book. And yet, even here, Jeremiah is criticized. His opponent encourages others to arrest him. Here, even in one of the most beautiful passages in Scripture, Jeremiah is publicly mocked and cancelled for what he has written.

Such is the life of this prophet, and probably anyone who seeks to walk a truly prophetic path. But it says, God is not mocked. Because Shemaiah encouraged so many people to believe his lies... “ Because Shemaiah had “prophesied when I did not send him and has made you trust in a lie, therefore, says the Lord: Behold, I will punish Shemaiah of Nehelam and his descendants. He shall not have anyone living among this people, and he shall not see the good that I will do to my people because he has spoken rebellion against the Lord.” He will be excluded from it because he led the people astray. Because he spoke lies.

God always know and God *always* sees.

The point here, for both Jeremiah and the exiles, is to walk everyday by faith. A forward-looking faith in the promises of God to bring goodness to His people. To bring welfare to use. And to bring justice. In His good time—justice. Which requires that we look back to person in whom all

of God's promises are yes—Jesus. To look back to the place where He proved His love for us. Where all the promises are yes, and we see proof that all of His promises *will be* yes to us in the future—His cross. There is the proof. There is the power. The place of His cross. We look back to that cross today, in the present, for a reminder for proof that His promise will be yes to us tomorrow. By doing that, we can walk by faith. His promises will be yes to us in Christ, and He is still working—every working—to bring us good. To bring us our welfare. To bring us a future and a hope.