

WEEKLY REFLECTION

In the NIV translation of Jeremiah 29:11, the Lord declares that He has “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Many misunderstand this to believe that God promises His followers “health, wealth, and prosperity.” But we see from the text of Jeremiah 29:4-14 that this is not true.

As we seek to apply Jeremiah 29:11 in its rightful context to our modern-day setting, let us understand these three things. (1), like the Hebrew people before us, we too are exiles to a broken world. Many readers of Scripture can become confused by the story of the exile, but it mirrors the full story of the Bible: there once were people who enjoyed communion and intimacy with God, but tragedy struck when they were ripped away from their homes and sent into exile as a result of their sin.

(2), God’s plan for us requires our endurance in suffering. In verses 5-7, God encourages the captives in Babylon to settle into their new life, to seek the peace and prosperity of the city. There will be suffering. The Bible never sugarcoats the truth of reality for us. It is confusing, heartbreaking, and difficult. Sometimes we can barely find the strength to go on. But we are reminded that life is a marathon, not a quick 100m sprint. In spite of the suffering that we face, we can find comfort in the fact that...

(3), God’s plan for us—His plans for welfare and not for evil, to give us a future and a hope—involves Him bringing us home. (v.8) God promised the Hebrew people that He would bring them back to the place from which He sent them into exile. (v.14b) He promised them that as long as they called upon Him and prayed to Him, He would hear them. (v.12b) When they sought Him with all their hearts, they would find Him. (v. 13) God was good to His Word, and eventually the Hebrew captives returned to their home in Jerusalem. We can have that same hope today, as we remember but celebrate how Jesus died to take us back home.

QUESTIONS

Before we jump straight into small group discussion or personal reflection, here are some videos and resources from The Bible Project that might be helpful to our understandings of the exile:

- Exile (Biblical Theme)
(<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/exile/>)
- The Way of the Exile
(<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/the-way-of-the-exile/>)

QUESTION ONE:

What are some of the biggest things you've hoped or planned for?

QUESTION TWO:

Share some of your past preconceptions about Jeremiah 29:11, and what you think the verse meant. Share also some instances where you have seen the verse applied, whether it is by you personally or by others around you.

Has your understanding of this verse changed? Now that you have had a chance to study it in its immediate context, how will you seek to apply the verse to your life?

QUESTION THREE:

Through Jesus, God makes a way for us to come back home. Jesus invites us back into God's presence, and the Eden ideal.

Take some time now to go through the passages of John 14:1-6 and 14:16-23. Based on these two passages, how does Jesus make a way for us to be at home in God while we live on earth? How does Jesus make a way for God to be at home in us?

How can you live differently, knowing that Jesus makes a way for us to be at home in God while we live in this broken world? How can you find the strength to do so, knowing that Jesus also makes a way for God to be at home in us?