

I have not turned my back on you

Hope when living under God's discipline

KEY TEXT—JEREMIAH 29:1-14

WHAT DOES GOD DO WHEN WE REBEL?

The question we are asking is this: how does God treat us when we deliberately and continually rebel against Him?

How did your parents treat you when you were constantly rebellious? Shout at you? Beat you? Ignore you? How our parents treated us will normally shape how we think God treats us. Our passage in Jeremiah gives some insight on this.

VERSES 1-3—THE CONTEXT

At the beginning of Jeremiah 29, we meet God's people. They have been constantly rebellious over many years. As a last resort, God has recently exiled them to Babylon through Nebuchadnezzar.

The problem is that after they first arrived, false prophets had arisen and declared that they would be returning to Jerusalem very soon. Back in Jerusalem, Jeremiah writes everyone a letter, telling them not to listen to these prophets because they are lying—they are not going home soon but will remain in Babylon for 70 years (Jeremiah 29:8-9). God had spelt this out back in chapter 25:11.

There are two main things that God says in the first 14 verses of Jeremiah 29. (1) Settle down—what to do for the next 70 years in Babylon, and (2) Promises of return and of hope.

VERSES 4-9—SETTLE DOWN

We begin with 3 instructions God gives to His people while they are in exile "This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon" v4...

1. Build houses v5
2. Have families v6
3. Pray for blessings for where you live v7

VERSES 10-14—PROMISES OF HOPE

Now we have 5 different promises for their future return:

1. I will come back for you v10
2. I have plans for you v11
3. I will listen to you v12
4. I will be found by you v13

5. I will bring you home again v14

These verses, particularly the last few promises, are well known. But I would like to consider the wider picture as we think how they may apply to our lives.

APPLICATION

To do this, look at God's involvement by noticing how many personal pronouns are used, both as He tells them to settle down and as He promises them hope:

- **v4** This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those **I carried into exile**
- **v7** seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which **I have carried you into exile**
- **v10** **I will come to you and fulfil my good promise**
- **v11** For **I know the plans I have for you**"
- **v12** **I will listen to you.** ¹³ You will seek me and **find me**
- **v14** **I will be found by you," ... I will gather you ... I have banished you," ... I carried you into exile"**

Here is the simple point I want you to notice:

When you have rebelled and turned your back on God, God has not turned His back on you.

I would suggest this is true because we see the following in these verses:

- **God is tender in punishment** God doesn't get angry and throw them away in the corner. Three times God says, "I carried you into exile" (v4, 7, 14). It's like a parent carrying their child up to their room to reflect on their naughtiness. In God's discipline for rebellion, He is still a tender Father. This is further emphasised in the next point.
- **God is personally active.** God doesn't say, I am really mad at those wicked people, so please will someone go and sort them out. No, it is "I carried", "I know", "I will come", "I will listen", "I will gather"

REFLECTION

- Is it time for you to change your view of God—to see that even in God's discipline, He is a loving Father?
- Is it time to return to God, or even come to God for the first time, knowing He longs to place you at the centre of His plans and promises?

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