

## Think About It: Making sense of the the most misunderstood and misused passages of the Bible

### Part 2: Did God really promise that?

#### Jeremiah 29:11

**INTRO:** **Jeremiah 29:11** “What a great promise for my graduation! Oh the places I’ll go!”

“Awesome! Everything will work out exactly as I want it! I just need to claim this promise!”

“If I just follow my heart and believe enough, God will bless me.”

FALSE... Not so fast skippy... This verse is not about you.

But it does bring into focus an important attribute of God.

Something amazing that can give us purpose, comfort and hope now... So let’s talk about it together.

**WE:** All the SWAG you can buy with this verse on it... Head to toe and mo’

Hats to sandals, rings, stickers, blankets, framed calligraphy for wall, temporary tattoo.

What is going on? This seems a bit crazy.

Like if we wear this verse, have it on our walls, good things will happen... Like good luck charm or magic spell.

“Chill out, Jon. You’re so mean. I really don’t appreciate your mocking tone. So people take this verse a little out of context and it gives them hope... what’s the problem?”

This is the problem... **Misunderstanding and misusing scripture can create a faith that can’t stand up to real life.**

Say we “Claim” this verse and then things don’t go as we want...

Go bankrupt, fail test we didn’t study for, divorce, get pregnant/can’t get pregnant, sickness/disease steals our health or our loved ones..

And we say... “But God, you said you had good plans for me! You promised no disaster! Where are you? Are you even real? Did I do something to make you reject me?”

Things start to go wrong and we think God has abandoned us.

Misunderstanding and misusing this verse sets us up for disillusionment, hurt, and anger.

So if it’s not about us... why do we read it? What do we do with it?

Ignore it? Skip it? Just say, “I don’t care what it’s “supposed” to mean... this is what it means to ME”?

Remember... Scripture can't mean to US what it never meant to THEM (the original audience of the text).

It's not some magic book where we can just pick out random lines and claim them as "ours."

There's a better way... with some good tools and study we can discover when/why this passage was written, to whom it was actually written, and then really have something concrete to teach us/guide us/transform us into who we were always meant to be...

**Reading scripture in its context can grow our trust in God in our own context.**

**GOD:** Rhythm **Step 1:** Discover Genre and historical setting

Don't have money to spend on a lot of study materials?- The Bible Project: Book Overviews are great.

Study Bible intros and bible dictionaries can also add info

**Who is author:** Jeremiah- Prophet of God and his compiler Baruch.

**What is it:** Collection of Jeremiah's warnings/sermons/experiences/etc.

**Genre:** Prophecy- God speaking to/warning/encouraging his people through his spokesperson.

And Narrative- telling the story of a specific period of time in Israel's history through Jeremiah's experience.

**When:** (Around 597) Act of Play- Israel

**Why writing:** Warn leaders/people of Israel to turn back to God.

People were not keeping their end of the covenant God had made with them.

Injustice. Worshiping idols.

Jeremiah warns them that there will be consequences...

God will allow Babylon to conquer Jerusalem and take the people into exile.

Which then actually happens.

Nebuchadnezzar... conquers Jerusalem, destroys temple, exiles many leaders and skilled workers to Babylon.

Jeremiah saw it and lived through it.

**Step 2:** Read the context of the whole text

Jumping into middle of book. But even so if we back up a little we can still get a lot of context for our verse...

**Jer. 29:1** Who is he talking to? Exiles in Babylon

In the next lines God through Jeremiah tells them to settle in.

- Make homes and lives for yourselves in Babylon.
- Get married, have kids, get them married and have grandchildren.
- Work for the peace and prosperity of Babylon

- Pray for its good.
- B/c if it does well you will also benefit...

But why settle?

### V. 8-9

Chapter 28: Other “prophets” were predicting a quick end and deliverance/Babylon would fall and everything would work out... giving people what they wanted to hear...

They were actually doing what our focus verse has been used to do for many... giving false hope/false promises to make people feel good but actually setting the people up for disillusionment.

God told them to settle in B/C...

### V. 10a [...seventy years.]

70 years... Must have been crushing. “You will die here... this isn’t going to be quick.”

“Your dreams of Babylon falling are smashed... things will NOT work out the way you were hoping/praying.”

BUT...

### Step 3: Engage the text V. 10-14

Beautiful message of hope... You are not forgotten. I will rescue/restore you  
I have not rejected you... when you are ready I will listen.

When you are ready to actually seek me wholeheartedly you will find me and I’ll bring you back home.

Now in the actual context who is the YOU in “I know the plans I have for YOU”? Hint: It’s not YOU.

You are not an ancient Israelite exiled to ancient Babylon b/c of your people’s disobedience to an agreement your ancestors made with God at Mt. Sinai.

God’s promises to Israel are not God’s promises to you. You don’t get to claim what was never yours.

Good rule: **Don’t claim it if you’re not the one to whom the author aimed it.**

“You”- Plural... the community of exiles.

What is God promising this community? “This is going to take a while... but there is hope. Your people still have a future.”

“You who are hearing this will die in Babylon, but your kids and especially your grandkids will be restored.”

### Step 4: Ask the Experts

One of those instances where if read in context, this passage isn’t all that confusing/debated.

But commentaries can be used to confirm that we are on the right track with our understanding of the context... and we are.

**Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary OT p. 1218**

*The "gracious promise" is that of the exiles restoration to Judah. Moreover, the Lord assured them that despite their surmise as to his lack of concern for their plight, he had not forgotten them. The Lord was not denying them hope for the future; it would not be realized immediately or in the near future. Jeremiah's words "hope and a future" are literally "an end and a hope," which means "a hopeful end." This word from the Lord was surely more heartening to the exiles' spirits than the false prophets' promises of quick deliverance.*

A good study Bible would give the same info.

Also we can find in commentaries/dictionaries... even wikipedia

That 70 yrs later the Persians conquer Babylon and the exiled Israelites are allowed to return to Jerusalem.

Read about in the OT books Ezra-Nehemiah.

Which can be confusing if reading Bible like timeline book b/c actually are placed before Jeremiah in the layout of OT.

But with all of this we see that God kept his promise... God did bring back the exiles... they are restored and do rebuild, and create a community into which ultimately Jesus is born.

Now that we understand what our passage means in its proper context...

**Step 5: Do something with it.**

What do we do with this... how can this passage, that has nothing to do with us, still be useful for training a JF to live out their role now?

This is still a part of God's story. Part of the foundation of our place in God's story...

So 1st: What does this show us about God?

God is not a God of wishful thinking. Doesn't just tell us what we want to hear.

**God is the God of the real world and wants us to live in reality.**

2nd: This passage isn't about following your dreams... It's about where God is/what he is doing when our dreams are smashed.

It shows us **We can trust God even when his plan and timing look nothing like what we've dreamed.**

God is in control even in the face of the largest empire in the world.

He's not surprised by events... and he do just "wing it" and figure something out.

He has his own plan and timing...for the world, our communities, and our own lives... and though we might not understand or even like it... even though it might not be the fulfillment of all our hopes and dreams... we can trust him.

**Ex:** Now that I'm 40 things haven't turned out exactly as I dreamed.. But I see God's timing and I know that I can trust him.

Why can we trust him?

**3rd:** **We can trust God b/c he's proven that he keeps his promises.**

Just as God kept his promise to the exiles, he will keep his promises to us...

What are his promises to US now? A few...

**John 3:16 / John 10:27-29 / John 16:33 / Romans 8:38-39 / Rev. 21:4**

**4th:** **While we wait for God to fulfill all of his promises,** just as the Jewish exiles, **we have a role to play.**

When God's people are in exile/living in a difficult place/time... God doesn't expect them to sit back, hide, pine away for a promised future, complain or work to undermine the community in which they find themselves.

While God is working in his timing, his people are to seek their community's peace and prosperity... to improve and pray for where they are now.

We settle and make our homes where we are... and bring peace and prosperity where we are now.. Bringing the KoG to earth now.

We are not citizens of this world **Philippians 3:20** but God has a role for us to play now... **1 Timothy 2:1-4**

**Put all together:** God keeps his promises- we have hope for a glorious future b/c of Jesus... but in the meantime our role is to live for our King by making a community and working and praying for the good of those around us.

**YOU:** **Read:** 1 Timothy 2:1-4

**Ask:** As we trust and wait on God's promises, what can we, as citizens of the Kingdom of God, do to work for the peace and prosperity of those around us?

**WE:** **Jeremiah 29:11**

So is it bad to have this verse give you hope?

Not at all... in fact, in its proper context, it's so much better than some fluffy ooey goey feel good mumbo jumbo...

When understood as it was meant to be understood... This passage shows us...

Though our dreams might be crushed, and life might look completely different from what we hoped/prayed for... God keeps his promises... He is in control. He has a plan/purpose for our lives and an ultimate future we can look forward to with confident hope.

**When we discover God's purpose for them THEN, we can more clearly see God's purpose for us NOW.**

Just maybe go easy on the t-shirts and tattoos.

### Summary

Taking "God's promises" in the Bible out of context has led to a lot of disillusionment, hurt, anger, and worse. So how do we know what a text actually means? Are there any promises that someone can "claim" today?

### Questions

1. Describe a time for you when things were not going your way. How did you deal with that?
2. Jon said, "Misunderstanding and misusing scripture can create a faith that can't stand up to real life." Do you agree or disagree? Do you see any other dangers to misunderstanding or misusing scripture?
3. Read these promises of Jesus, including John 6:37; Matthew 11:28; John 14:15-21. Looking back at a few of these, what stands out to you? What would relying on these promises look like for you?
4. As we trust God and wait and rely on his promises, how do you think we can play out our role as his people here and now? (Hint: Check out 1 Timothy 2:1-4)
5. How can your group pray for you this week?

### Main Points:

Misunderstanding and misusing scripture can create a faith that can't stand up to real life.

Reading scripture in its context can grow our trust in God in our own context.

Good rule: Don't claim it if you're not the one to whom the author aimed it.

1. God is the God of the real world and wants us to live in reality.
2. We can trust God even when his plan and timing look nothing like what we've dreamed.
3. We can trust God b/c he's proven that he keeps his promises.
4. While we wait for God to fulfill all of his promises, we have a role to play.

When we discover God's purpose for them THEN, we can more clearly see God's purpose for us NOW.

### Weekly Challenge:

Read: 1 Timothy 2:1-4

Ask: As we trust and wait on God's promises, what can we, as citizens of the Kingdom of God, do to work for the peace and prosperity of those around us?

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SHOW NOTES


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Music: Headhunters, by Herbie Hancock <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3m3qOD-hhrQ>

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