

God Has a Plan
Jeremiah 29: 11 – 13
April 18, 2010

We've heard it said that God loves us and has a wonderful plan for our lives. It's easy to agree when we love the plan. But sometimes God's plan turns out to be different than what we were expecting. You may be happily married with two kids; you have no intentions of adding any more to the census. But one day you come home, and the wife says, "Guess what? I went to the doctor, and he says we're going to have two more kids!"

Sometimes, God's plan is different than what we were thinking. Maybe you are perfectly happy with your job situation; then your boss calls you in and says, "We need to make some changes here, and I'm afraid I have to let you go." You look out the windshield of your car on the way home to tell your family and ask, "Lord, what is happening? I thought I was where you wanted me to be, doing what I thought you wanted me to do! What's going on?"

Or perhaps someone you love is fighting cancer; you're counting on God to come through for them just as He always has. You are counting on God for a miracle! But the doctor calls with test results you don't want to hear, and were unprepared to hear. Sometimes, God's plan is different than what we were counting on.

The same was true of the Jewish people in Jeremiah Chapter 29. The year was 597 BC. God is judging the nation of Judah because of their unfaithfulness. The Babylonians had attacked Jerusalem, sacked the city, and carried 3,000 prisoners – including the king, government leaders, and skilled craftsmen – back to Babylon. The Jews (God's chosen people) were saying, "This is not supposed to happen to us! We're the apple of God's eye! What is going on?"

The Jewish people had a beautiful history of God coming through for them in times of crisis. In Exodus 3: 7, the Lord told Moses, "I have seen the misery of my people. I am concerned about their suffering at the hands of the Egyptians. So I'm going to bring them out of the land of Egypt."

And God does precisely that. In Exodus Chapter 14, He brings them through the Red Sea on dry land to accomplish their escape from tyranny and slavery. Forty years later, the Israelites inherit the Promised Land (Joshua 24). And in 2 Kings 19, the Assyrian army invades the land; everyone was terrified. The commander of the Assyrian army said, "No one can deliver you from my hand. Surrender now, and we will let you live!" But Hezekiah prayed to the Lord for the people, and that very night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death 185,000 in the Assyrian camp. Almighty God had come through once more! His plan was still unfolding in the lives of His people.

So, when the Babylonians invaded in 597 BC, the captives were thinking, "This isn't going to last long; God is going to break through for us as He has done so many times before." The prophet Hananiah is quoted in Jeremiah Chapter 28 saying the captivity wouldn't last very long, no more than two years. "God will break the yoke of the king of Babylon, and we will be free! You'll come home! Praise God!"

But Jeremiah writes a letter to the captives in Babylon, recorded in Jeremiah 29; 1 — 6. Basically he says, “You’re not coming home for a while. Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce; marry and have children.”

In other words, God is saying, “You’re not going home because I have plans for you in Babylon.” Then in Verse Seven, Jeremiah says, “Seek the peace of the city where I have carried you into captivity. Pray to the Lord, because when it prospers, you will prosper, too.”

“Jeremiah, have you lost your mind?” the Jews must have thought. “You want us to pray for the brutes who sacked the city of God, who carried off the treasure and leaders of Israel? These are the enemies of God!”

But God doesn’t want us to be bitter toward the non-Christian world. He wants us to be a blessing to the world. He wants us to pray for people even if they are different from us, even if/when they treat us badly. Jesus echoed that same advice in Matthew 5: 44 – “Love your neighbor as your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

Then in Verse Ten, God says something else guaranteed to rile up the Jews: “When seventy years are completed for you in Babylon, I come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.” In seventy years, most – if not all of the present captives – would be dead and gone! What kind of a plan is this, Lord?

But if you examine the Old Testament record, you will see God accomplished great things in the lives of His people during the intervening seventy years.

Number One: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 10) were three young captives who distinguished themselves as some of the best administrators in Babylon (remember the infamous lion’s den?);

Number Two: Daniel, another captive, was able to interpret a dream of King Nebuchadnezzar, and became administrator over an entire province;

Number Three: With Daniel’s help – and example – Nebuchadnezzar became a believer in Jehovah God (Daniel 4: 37);

Number Four: because the people lived in peace for those 70 years, they had time to write some of the greatest books of the Old Testament: 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Psalm 137.

Number Five: Most importantly, the people began to realize they needed to get right with God! They began to see they needed to apologize for the mistakes of the past. Jeremiah 4: 18 says, “Your own conduct and actions brought this upon you.”

So when you look at the big picture, you can see God is working behind the scenes in the hearts and minds of the people, even though they couldn’t see it. My friends, God’s plan isn’t always what we think it ought to be, but it is always the best plan.

And that brings us to Jeremiah 29: 11 – “For I know the plans I have for you...” I am reminded that, even though I don’t know all the plans God has for my life, God knows them. You see...

1. God sees our tomorrow before it becomes our “today” (Jeremiah 29: 11a).

A. If you are up in the Goodyear blimp over a parade, you can look down and see the

beginning elements, the middle, and the end of the parade – and everything in between.

B. That's how God sees your life (Psalm 139: 16: "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.")

2. If you are a Believer, you have a hope and a future far beyond the parameters of this life (v. 11c).

A. For the Jewish people, that meant going BACK to the Promised Land; for us, it means going UP to the Promised Land.

1. You have a hope that He Who began a good work in you will one day carry it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

2. You have the hope that one day God will be finished with the work He been doing in your life, and you will reign with Christ forever and ever!

B. In fact, the whole message of Jeremiah is that the word of the Lord always comes true.

1. The first 25 chapters of Jeremiah, God says repeatedly, "I am going to judge the nation of Judah because they have forsaken the Lord..." And that's what happened.

2. And in 30: 3 God says, "The days are coming, when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess." Fifty years later, the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon and the Jews were allowed to return home!

C. And in 31: 31, God says... (read).

1. 630 years later, God ratified this new covenant when He sent His Son to die on the Cross for our sins, and we now have the opportunity to know the Lord ourselves. We have the opportunity to be forgiven.

3. While we may not know the entire scenario, we can have access to the Father Who conceived those plans (vs. 12 – 13).

A. This is the grand message from God's statement in Jeremiah 29: 11. He is not hidden, or distant. He can be found; and He wants to be found.

And even if you don't consider yourself especially religious, this is something you can do. I read recently about the actor Kirk Cameron ("Growing Pains" on TV). He had everything a teenager might want: fame, money, and all the perks of the life. One day, a girlfriend's dad said, "Kirk, you have a lot of things, but there's one thing you don't have. You don't have God. You don't have eternal life."

Then he took Kirk to church. And Kirk heard the gospel for the first time. He became conflicted; on one hand, he felt great guilt – he wasn't living for God; on the other hand, he felt amazing hope, for he realized for the first time Jesus loved him enough to die for his sins on the Cross.

A month later, Kirk was sitting in his car, and he asked himself, "If I die today in a car accident, would I go to heaven?" The apparent answer was, "No." Right there he prayed the first prayer of his life: "Lord, I realize you have a great plan of my life. And I don't want to miss it. Forgive my sins; come into my life. In Jesus' name, amen."

Today, Kirk Cameron has a full-time ministry, seeking to introduce others to the God Who has plans for their lives as well. How about you? Do you know Him?

Let's pray!