

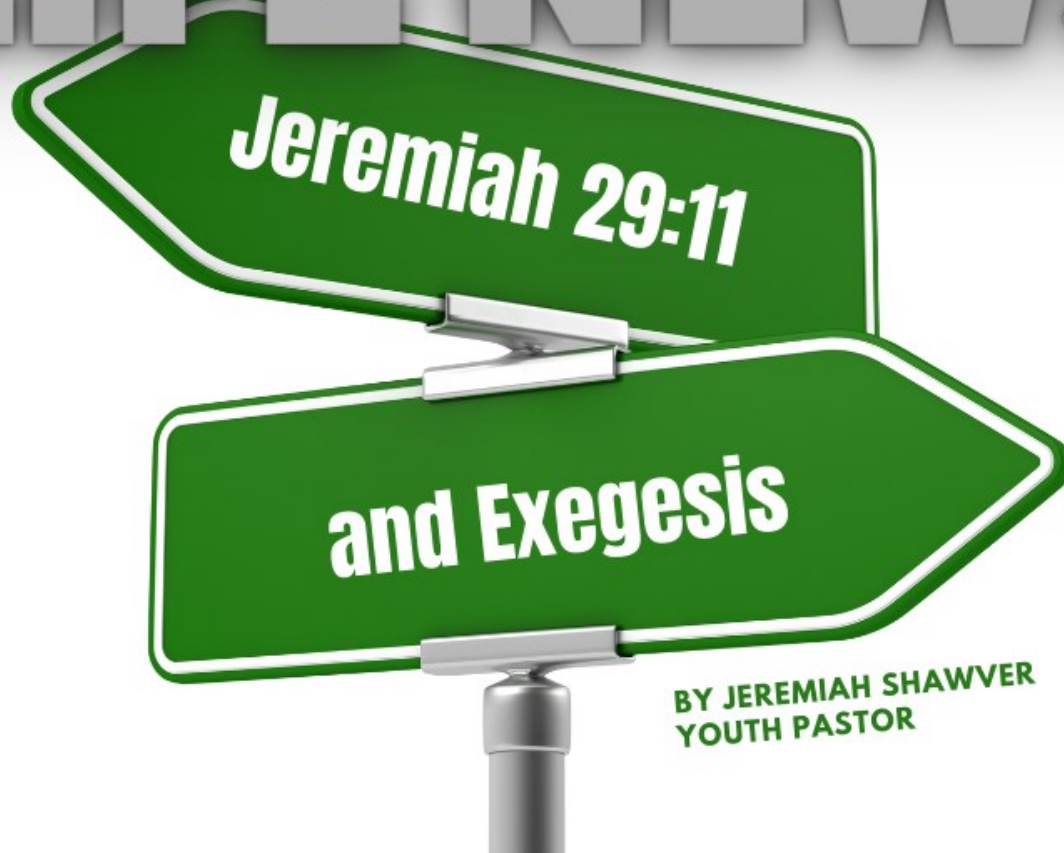


PARKSIDE

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LIFE NEWS



In 2 Timothy 2:15, Timothy is commanded to study and show that he is a worker who can rightly handle the word of truth. This is a command to Timothy but is passed down to the saint as a command for every Christian. Our goal should be that we are able to open scripture and understand it and be able to understand the intended meaning. This means we must engage in exegesis. **Exegesis** is a fancy word from Greek that simply means to "draw out." When we read scripture, our goal is to draw the meaning from the text. So, we must not come to a text hoping to justify our own thoughts or our worldviews. There are many passages that are often ripped out of context. This week I want to walk through one of these misapplied passages.

One of the most misused verses in scripture is Jeremiah 29:11 – "For I know the plans I have for you"—this is the Lord's declaration— "plans for your well-being, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." Every year high school and college

graduates are inundated with cards and gifts printed with this verse. It is an easy verse to pull out of its context and to apply to our lives when we want a pick-me-up. This passage and its misuse have a lot to teach us about our understanding of scripture.

Our first rule for exegesis is context, context, context. If we do not understand the context of a passage, we will not understand why it is in scripture and how it is important to us. In the case of Jeremiah 29, we must read the entire passage to get the context. Notice in verse 11 we begin with the word: "for." This simple word tells us the Lord is giving the reason for the previous verse. If we always skip to verse 11, we will not understand why it is important that God knows the plans he has for His people.

Jeremiah 29 is a letter written to the exiles (notice: this plural means that you in this text should be y'all) being taken into captivity in Babylon. The letter tells them they are going to be in

a different land under a different king for 70 years. The letter begins in verses 4-7 with an encouragement to live their normal lives in Babylon. They will be there for 70 years, and so they are to build houses, give their children in marriage, and plant gardens. They are to live at peace under the government in Babylon as they keep the law of God. The LORD continues in verses 8-9 by instructing them not to listen to the prophets who might disagree with this letter. Those who would say that they were told by God that the Israelites would be freed after 10, 20, 30, or even 60 years, these men do not speak from God. It is only then that we get our famous verse. God will bring Israel back to their land after 70 years. The promise that He knows the plans for them is directly connected to the promised land.

Having this context, we can correctly understand the passage. This passage ends with a condemnation of the kings and prophets who have said they speak for God. Their end is destruction. This passage is not about our wildest dreams coming true and everything working out well for us.

We are not promised a world without trouble. This brings us to our second rule: Scripture interprets scripture. Over and over in the Old and New Testaments, we are told that this world will be hard, that God causes rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous, that we should expect trouble, and that we will have fiery trials among us. With this understanding of the life of a believer, we cannot then turn to Jeremiah 29:11 and say that God wishes to give us prosperity and a life without suffering. When we allow all of scripture to speak for itself and read the passage in context, we find that this passage is not teaching a life in which God has ordained for me to save the world. Instead, we find a community being spoken to about God's plan to redeem them.

The final rule I will give you for today is this: All scripture is useful. 2 Timothy 3 tells us that all of scripture is useful to us today. Peter tells us we have everything we need for life and godliness. This helps us as we come to Jeremiah 29. I have often heard people say that Jeremiah 29 has been ripped out of context, and therefore we should not apply it to Christians. This is not the case because all scripture is God-breathed and is useful. How then are we to use Jeremiah 29?

1 We are exiles: 1 Peter 2:11 tells us that we are exiles in the lands we live in. How are we exiles? We are citizens of the kingdom of God and therefore live our present lives as exiles on the earth awaiting the day when we will be brought to our promised land – new heaven and new earth. So, like the Israelites in Jeremiah 29 we find ourselves waiting for the promise of God to be fulfilled.

2 God does know the plan he has for us. If we read through the New Testament, God is going to fulfill His promise to recreate the world. Jesus' return is imminent. He will come to judge the living and the dead, and we will get to enter into our promised land. This is a promise given to each of us as we believe in Jesus, but it is also a promise to the community of faith. In Jeremiah 29:11, we ought to read "I know the plans I have for y'all." God will redeem his people.

3 Mark and avoid false prophets. Just as in the days of the exile, there have been countless false prophets who have said God gave them a special revelation of his return. Jesus commands us not to listen to them (Matthew 24). We should mark and avoid such people because God has not spoken to them.

4 Our commands are similar to that of the exiles in Babylon. Pastor Nigel wrote last week about living quiet lives; this is the command given to the exiles. We should be planting gardens, having weddings and funerals, building our families. As we do these things, we are to fulfill the law of Christ doing the good deeds He has prepared for us to do.

This passage has so much more for us than a simple, "God has big dreams for you" application. Instead, it is an encouragement to hold on to our faith and to remain steadfast as we live together, waiting on the promises of God. 🙏



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