



The **Fiery** Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 29:1-32

Topic

The Lord encourages His chosen people to set their minds on seeking Him during their seventy year captivity in Babylon

Title

"A Mindset is a Terrible Thing to Waste"

Introduction

Christians are the original 'occupy movement.'

They don't just occupy Wall Street. They occupy **all** streets, wherever they live or work or happen to be at the time.

Jesus told His disciples "occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13). He explained what He meant with a parable in which He pictured Himself as a certain nobleman who was going away to a far country for a time to receive a kingdom and then return. He pictured His disciples - including you and I - as servants to whom He distributed money, called "talents," they were to invest for Him until His return at which time He would reward those who were faithful to "occupy."

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Two servants occupied well and were rewarded while one hid the talent the Master had given him thereby forfeiting any reward.

Our text in Jeremiah twenty-nine has an "occupy till I come" feel to it. Jeremiah tells the Jews they will be captive in Babylon for the next seventy years so they should settle there and make the most of it.

As we work through the verses in their original context we can talk about how we occupy our lives in light of the Lord's promise that He's gone to receive His kingdom but will definitely return to establish it and, when He does, His reward will be with Him for His faithful servants.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Your Life's Purpose Is To Be Occupied With The Things Of The Lord, and #2 Your Life Is Too Precious To Be Occupied With The Things Of The World.

#1 Your Life's Purpose
Is To Be Occupied With The Lord
(v1-14)

Jeremiah doesn't use the word but you really could summarize his counsel to them by simply saying "occupy."

Jeremiah 29:1 Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders who were carried away captive - to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Jeremiah 29:2 (This happened after Jeconiah the king, the queen mother, the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem.)

Jeremiah 29:3 The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, saying,

Jeremiah 29:4 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon:

Jeremiah 29:5 Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit.

Jeremiah 29:6 Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters - that you may be increased there, and not diminished.

Jeremiah 29:7 And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace.

On the surface it may sound as if God was telling them to become assimilated into Babylon - get married, build houses, plant gardens.

Keep something in mind as we comment on these verses. God had promised, and will reiterate in verse ten, that the captivity would end after seventy years with the Jews able to return to Jerusalem. Everything they were being told must be interpreted by that insight.

That means that when they took wives to beget children it was so they "may be increased" **as a distinct people** and not be "diminished." It was a command *not* to intermarry with the Babylonians but to remain separated unto The Lord.

They were to "build" their own houses, in the manner of Jews, rather than buy Babylonian houses. They were to "plant gardens and eat their fruit" because so much of the diet of the Babylonians was forbidden to Jews.

They were to live in Babylon not as Babylonians but as a separated people of God who knew that they would one day be returning to their kingdom.

As Christians we know Jesus is coming at any moment to resurrect and rapture the church. After an interval of seven years, while the earth is experiencing the Great Tribulation, Jesus will return to earth with us in His glorious Second Coming to establish His kingdom.

With that insight - with that foresight, really - we are to remain separated to The Lord.

- Like the Jews we are to marry own own kind - other believers.
- Our homes should be built on solid Christian principles.
- Our lives should bear much spiritual fruit.

Jeremiah 29:8 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed.

Jeremiah 29:9 For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the LORD.

Jeremiah 29:10 For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place.

There was a strong 'anti-occupy' movement. The false prophets were saying that God would defeat the Babylonians and the Jews would soon be returning to Jerusalem. They *would* be returning - but not for seven decades.

In our case it isn't so much that false prophets tell us The Lord isn't returning as it is that we lose the sense His coming is at any moment. Lose that and you let down your guard and tend to start living more for yourself than for The Lord and for others. Selfishness creeps in where selflessness ought to prevail. Comfort takes priority over commitment. Happiness replaces holiness.

Lose the sense that the Lord's coming is imminent and you will tend to start living more for yourself than for Him and for others. Selfishness creeps in where selflessness ought to prevail. Comfort takes priority over commitment. Happiness replaces holiness.

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

The whole Bible is the inspired Word of God and, thus, wonderful, but this verse is special. Though originally spoken to the Jews it reveals the mind of God towards all those He calls His own in every dispensation.

Why the captivity? Not to be "evil" towards the Jews but to reestablish "peace" in His relationship with them that they had broken through sin.

If God had not intervened, if He had not used Babylon to discipline His people, if they had been allowed to continue in their sin, they would forfeit their "future" and have no "hope."

The things God permits in and around your life always flow from thoughts of maintaining or restoring peace to give you your best future and to firmly establish, not destroy, your hope at His appearing.

Jeremiah 29:12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.

Jeremiah 29:13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

Jeremiah 29:14 I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.

These verses were written to backsliders. They are really more about what God would do to restore them. He would discipline them. Restoration was the goal. Babylon was the means God must use.

They would see the world for what it was while simultaneously realizing all they had lost. They would turn to The Lord.

If you find God using extreme measures upon you, realize He is trying to restore you, not destroy you. He designs seasons of captivity and the like so you must seek Him and Him alone.

#2 Your Life Is Too Precious To Become Occupied With The World

(v15-32)

God could certainly defeat Babylon but to what end? The Jews would be even more bold to sin against Him.

No, they had become so occupied with the world, they had adopted so much of the world's thinking, manners, and customs, that God must give them an overdose of the world in order to show them that their lives as His people were too precious to waste on things like idolatry.

Jeremiah 29:15 Because you have said, "The LORD has raised up prophets for us in Babylon"-

Jeremiah 29:16 therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, concerning all the people who dwell in this city, and concerning your brethren who have not gone out with you into captivity -

Jeremiah 29:17 thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will send on them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like rotten figs that cannot be eaten, they are so bad.

Jeremiah 29:18 And I will pursue them with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence; and I will deliver them to trouble among all the kingdoms of the earth - to be a curse, an astonishment, a hissing, and a reproach among all the nations where I have driven them,

Jeremiah 29:19 because they have not heeded My words, says the LORD, which I sent to them by My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; neither would you heed, says the LORD.

It may sound silly to say this, but sin isn't good for you. It may be pleasurable initially but it is painful in the end. It's painful in ways you can't even imagine and don't want to; but when it strikes, it's awful.

It takes a very arrogant heart to think you can manage sin and not be affected by it. And it's just sad to think that you would prefer sin over your Savior when you consider Jesus endured the Cross to set you free from slavery to sin to voluntarily serve Him.

Jeremiah 29:20 Therefore hear the word of the LORD, all you of the captivity, whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Jeremiah 29:21 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, who prophesy a lie to you in My name: Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall slay them before your eyes.

Jeremiah 29:22 And because of them a curse shall be taken up by all the captivity of Judah who are in Babylon, saying, "The LORD make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire";

Jeremiah 29:23 because they have done disgraceful things in Israel, have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives, and have spoken lying words in My name, which I have not commanded them. Indeed I know, and am a witness, says the LORD.

I wouldn't have wanted to be Ahab or Zedekiah. But then I never think I am going to be one of those guys - a guy singled-out for sinning. While I can be thankful that God doesn't expose me every time I sin, maybe I'd be better off thinking He will, for my own good.

As God in His longsuffering waited to finalize the Babylonian captivity, their false prophecies seemed true and they went about as if their interpretation of things was accurate.

God's longsuffering with sinners is why Jesus has not yet resurrected and raptured His church. During the delay the scoffers and false prophets and false teachers seem to be enjoying success. It's going to be that way right up until the end.

The Word of God must be our foundation. We must look to it to make our judgments. Our lives are too precious to waste them listening to lies when people are perishing.

Jeremiah 29:24 You shall also speak to Shemaiah the Nehelamite, saying,

Jeremiah 29:25 Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying: You have sent letters in your name to all the people who are at Jerusalem, to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests, saying,

Jeremiah 29:26 "The LORD has made you priest instead of Jehoiada the priest, so that there should be officers in the house of the LORD over every man who is demented and considers himself a prophet, that you should put him in prison and in the stocks.

Jeremiah 29:27 Now therefore, why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth who makes himself a prophet to you?

Jeremiah 29:28 For he has sent to us in Babylon, saying, 'This captivity is long; build houses and dwell in them, and plant gardens and eat their fruit.' "

Jeremiah 29:29 Now Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the hearing of Jeremiah the prophet.

Jeremiah 29:30 Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying:

Jeremiah 29:31 Send to all those in captivity, saying, Thus says the LORD concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite: Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, and I have not sent him, and he has caused you to trust in a lie -

Jeremiah 29:32 therefore thus says the LORD: Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his family: he shall not have anyone to dwell among this people, nor shall he see the good that I will do for My people, says the LORD, because he has taught rebellion against the LORD.

Zephaniah read Shemaiah's letter to Jeremiah - the one that called him "demented" and demanded he be arrested and put in stocks. Jeremiah answered it with a Word from The Lord.

One application, for us, is to realize that nonbelievers are going to scoff at your life, at your insistence The Lord could return at any moment.

Nonbelievers are going to criticize everything you think and do - your whole worldview - because it is grounded in your love for Jesus. They might think you demented and, where they hold political power, they will incarcerate or otherwise persecute you.

Another application is to encourage us as believers to not become Shemaiah's by being drawn away from the beauty of The Lord by the beckoning of the world.

In one of the *Pirate's of the Caribbean* feature films mermaids were depicted as beckoning the men with their outward beauty only to be revealed as monsters who would drown them and drag them to horrible drowning deaths.

Mermaids do exist, in this sense - the world puts on a beautiful exterior to lure you to your doom.

Anything worldly, at odds with obedience to Christ, looks beautiful but is deadly in the end. Don't be fooled.

Instead remember that The Lord makes all things beautiful - but He does it in His time. His beauty, revealed in you, is always something worth waiting for.

Jesus exerts a controlling power over the world. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. "By Him all things consist," and nothing can happen without His permission.

At the same time His real, literal, visible, complete kingdom the Lord Jesus has not yet received. To use the words of Hebrews 2:8, "We see not yet all things put under Him." In the psalms you read, "He sits on the right hand of the Father till His enemies are made His footstool."

It is during this delay, some two thousand years now, that we are to be the Lord's occupation forces. Whatever talents, whatever gifts, whatever finances, whatever relationships; anything and everything that constitutes our lives, ought to be occupied with Him. Only then will our lives have purpose and count for something in the end.

On the subject of "occupy" J.C. Ryle wrote,

The Lord Jesus bids you "occupy." He wants His servants not only to receive His wages, and eat His bread, and dwell in His house, and belong to His family, but also to do His work. You are to "let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works." Have you faith? It must not be a dead faith: it must "work by love." Are you elect? You are elect unto "obedience." Are you redeemed? You are redeemed that you may be "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Do you love Christ? Prove the reality of your love by keeping Christ's commandments. Oh, reader, do not forget this charge to "occupy!"

There's no value, not eternally, in building our own kingdom. There **is** value, for eternity, in furthering God's kingdom by occupying till He comes.

There's a famous ad campaign whose slogan is, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." We might say, "A mindset is a terrible thing to waste."

Don't set your mind on the things of the world; you're too precious for that. Set your mind on the things of The Lord.