

The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 14: A Letter to the Exiles

Jeremiah 29:1-32

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this chapter teaches the faithfulness of God to His word and His sovereign rule over history. The seventy years (29:10) and the promise of “a future and a hope” (29:11) are not a vague optimism but God’s certain pledge, set within His own timing, which He kept exactly. The teacher must establish two things. First, the return from exile was a real, datable, historical event; God brought His people back. Second, and more deeply, that return pointed beyond itself to the far greater spiritual restoration God accomplishes in Christ. The promised gathering and the seeking-and-finding of God (29:12-14) reach their fullest meaning in the gospel age, in which God gathers His people, the true and spiritual Israel, the church (Galatians 6:16; Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-8). The teacher must carefully guard against the dispensational error that reads these restoration promises as a blueprint or timetable for the modern political nation of Israel, a rebuilt temple, or an earthly kingdom; the kingdom and the true homecoming are fulfilled in Christ and His church.

The chapter also teaches faithful living within a pagan culture. God’s instruction to build, plant, marry, and “seek the welfare of the city” (29:5-7) is a timeless model for Christians who are themselves sojourners and exiles in this world (1 Peter 2:11-12). We are neither to assimilate into the world’s idolatry nor to withdraw in bitter isolation, but to live holy, fruitful, prayerful lives that bless the very communities where God has placed us. Alongside this, the teacher should press the danger of false prophets and false hope (29:8-9, 29:32), and God’s holiness in judging those who speak lies in His name.

Beyond the doctrine, the lesson aims at the formation of the student. Every believer knows the ache of exile, of waiting on God’s timing, of being surrounded by voices that promise easier and quicker than God does. The teacher’s goal is that students would learn to live faithfully and fruitfully where God has placed them, to refuse the false comfort of half-truths, and to anchor their hope not in a slogan but in the God who truly does have plans for them, a future and a hope, fulfilled in Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 29:4-7. God tells the exiles to build houses, plant gardens, marry, and “seek the welfare of the city” of Babylon, praying for it (29:7). What does this command reveal about how God’s people are to live faithfully even in the midst of a pagan culture that is not their home?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the scene before opening the text. The letter of chapter 29 is written to the first wave of exiles, taken to Babylon in 597 BC with King Jehoiachin. They are a displaced people, grieving, homesick, and gripped by the hope that this will all be over soon. Jeremiah's letter, carried by royal envoys (29:3), lands like cold water: settle down, this will take a while.

Notice the striking commands of verses 5–7. Build houses. Plant gardens. Marry and raise families. Multiply. These are the rhythms of a settled, ordinary life, and God commands them in the heart of a hostile empire. God's people are not to put life on hold while they wait; they are to live faithfully and fruitfully right where God has, in His providence, placed them.

Then comes the command that must have stunned them: "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf" (29:7). The word for welfare is *shalom*, peace and flourishing. They are to pray for Babylon's *shalom*, to work for the good of their captors' city, because in its welfare they will find their own. This is not assimilation into Babylon's idolatry; it is being a blessing within it.

Draw the line to the Christian as sojourner. Peter uses this very posture: we are "sojourners and exiles" whose honorable conduct leads pagans to glorify God (1 Peter 2:11–12). We are not of the world, but we are sent into it to bless it, to pray for it, to seek the good of the city, the workplace, the neighborhood where God has placed us. Withdrawal and bitterness are not options; neither is blending in.

Land it warmly. Wherever you feel like an exile, in a job, a town, a season you did not choose, God's word is the same: do not waste it, do not resent it, bless it. Your welfare is bound up with seeking the welfare of the people around you.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faithful, fruitful living in the place of God's providential placing, not life on hold (29:5–6).
- Seeking the welfare (*shalom*) of a pagan city without sharing its idolatry (29:7).
- The Christian as sojourner and exile, called to bless the world, not withdraw from it (1 Peter 2:11–12).
- God's providence even in hard, unchosen circumstances.
- The difference between holy distinctiveness and bitter isolation.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to "seek the welfare" of a place you did not choose to be?
- How is praying for and blessing a community different from assimilating into its sins?
- Where has God placed you as a sojourner, and how might He want you to bless it?

Question 2

Student Question:

God called His people to bless and pray for Babylon, the city of their captivity, rather than to withdraw in bitterness (29:7). Where are you tempted to withdraw from, resent, or write off the place or people God has set you among, and what would it look like to seek their welfare instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question turns the exiles' calling into a mirror. The temptation in exile is to withdraw, to resent, to mentally check out of a place that is not home. God forbids it. He calls His people to invest, to pray, to seek the good of the very place that hurt them.

Help students locate their own "Babylon." It may be a city they never wanted to live in, a job that feels like a sentence, a family situation they cannot change, a culture that feels increasingly hostile to faith. The flesh wants to grumble and disengage; God calls for prayer and fruitful presence.

Distinguish faithful engagement from compromise. Seeking the city's welfare does not mean adopting its values. It means being the kind of neighbor, worker, and citizen whose presence is a blessing, whose prayers ascend for the place, whose life makes others glad God's people are there.

Move toward something concrete. Ask each person to name one place or relationship they have been writing off, and one small step of seeking its welfare: a prayer prayed, a kindness done, a presence offered rather than withdrawn.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temptation to resent or disengage from an unchosen place.
- Blessing and prayer as the antidote to exile-bitterness (29:7).
- Faithful engagement without worldly compromise.
- Being a blessing where God has placed us, not only where we would choose.

Discussion Prompts

- What is your "Babylon," the place or people you are tempted to write off?
- What is one concrete way you could seek that place's welfare this week?
- How does praying for a place change your heart toward it?

Question 3**Student Question:**

Read 29:8–9. God warns the exiles not to listen to the prophets and diviners among them who “prophecy a lie to you in my name” (29:9). Why is false hope, the comforting message that the hard road will be shorter and easier than God says, so dangerous to God’s people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 8–9 expose the real danger in the exilic community: false prophets and diviners promising a quick deliverance. “Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you... it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name” (29:8–9). The lie was attractive because it was easier and shorter than the truth.

Teach why false hope is so dangerous. It is not merely wrong information; it shapes how people live. The exiles who believed Babylon would fall any day would not build, would not plant, would not settle, would not seek the city’s welfare. False hope produces a paralyzed, unsettled, unfruitful people. The comforting lie keeps God’s people from doing the very things God commands.

Note that the lie was spoken “in my name” (29:9). The most dangerous falsehoods come dressed as the word of God. This is why God’s people must test every message against what God has actually said, not against what they wish were true (1 John 4:1).

Apply it honestly. We are forever tempted to prefer the teacher, the book, the voice that tells us the road will be shorter and the cost lower than God says. The truth that the exile would last seventy years was painful, but it was the truth, and only the truth could be lived on.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- False prophets promising an easier, quicker path than God’s true word (29:8–9).
- False hope as a paralyzing, unfruitful force in God’s people.
- The danger of lies spoken “in the name of the LORD.”
- The duty to test every message against what God has actually said (1 John 4:1).
- The hardness, and the safety, of building life on the truth.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is a comforting lie often more dangerous than a hard truth?
- How does false hope keep God’s people from obeying His actual commands?
- How can we test whether a message is truly from God or merely what we want to hear?

Question 4

Student Question:

The exiles were surrounded by voices promising a quicker, easier deliverance than God had actually promised (29:8–9). What “false prophets,” voices, messages, or hopes, are you tempted to believe because they tell you what you want to hear rather than what is true?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses the false-prophet theme into the student's own listening habits. We all curate the voices we let speak to us, and the temptation is to gather the ones that flatter our hopes rather than tell us the truth (2 Timothy 4:3–4).

Help students name their “diviners.” It may be a culture that promises fulfillment in money, image, or self; a teacher who softens what God has made plain; an inner voice that whispers a particular sin “won’t really matter”; or a hope built on what we want rather than what God has said.

Distinguish faith’s hope from wishful thinking. Biblical hope rests on God’s promises and is willing to wait seventy years if God says so. False hope rests on our preferences and demands relief now. The first builds houses and plants gardens; the second keeps its bags packed.

Move to honesty. Ask each person to name one message they keep returning to mainly because it tells them what they want to hear, and to bring it under the test of God’s actual word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temptation to gather voices that flatter rather than tell the truth (2 Timothy 4:3–4).
- The difference between hope grounded in God’s promise and wishful thinking grounded in our wants.
- Self-examination about which voices we let shape us.
- Willingness to embrace hard truth over comfortable falsehood.

Discussion Prompts

- Which voices or messages do you return to mainly because they tell you what you want to hear?
- How can you tell the difference between God-grounded hope and wishful thinking?
- What hard truth from God have you been reluctant to face?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 29:10–11. God promises, “When seventy years are completed... I will visit you” and “I know the plans I have for you... plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (29:10–11). What does this promise reveal about God’s sovereignty over history, His faithfulness to His word, and the true nature of the “future and hope” He gives?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here is the heart of the chapter, verses 10–11. God sets a number on the exile: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you

back to this place” (29:10). This reveals God’s sovereignty over history. Babylon’s rise and fall, the length of the exile, the timing of the return, all are in His hand, not Babylon’s and not the exiles’.

Then comes the beloved verse 11: “I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” The teacher must reset this verse in its true setting. It is not a private promise of personal prosperity stitched on a pillow; it is God’s word to a community in chains, who would wait a lifetime to see it. That setting makes it stronger, not weaker. God’s good plans hold even across seventy years of hardship.

Teach what the “future and hope” truly is. Its first horizon is the real, historical return from Babylon, which God accomplished. But its deepest horizon is the future and hope God gives in Christ, the spiritual restoration and homecoming of His people. The verse is not a guarantee that God will spare us all difficulty; it is a guarantee that God’s purposes toward His people are good, and that He is bringing them to a hope no exile can finally destroy.

Guard carefully against two errors. Do not shrink the verse into a slogan of self-help optimism, as if God promised every believer comfort, health, and success on demand. And do not stretch the surrounding restoration promises into a dispensational timetable for a modern political Israel; God’s gathering of His people is fulfilled in Christ and His church (Romans 9:6–8).

Land it with comfort and realism together. The same God who set seventy years for Babylon governs your seasons of waiting. His plans for His people are good, His timing is wise, and the future and hope He gives are secured in Christ, beyond the reach of any present trouble.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s sovereignty over history and over the timing of His promises (29:10).
- Jeremiah 29:11 read in its true setting, as God’s word to waiting exiles, not a personal prosperity slogan.
- The “future and hope” as both the real return from exile and, more deeply, the hope God gives in Christ.
- The danger of dispensational readings that turn restoration promises into a timetable for a modern political Israel; fulfillment is in Christ and the church (Romans 9:6–8).
- Trust in God’s good purposes that holds even across long seasons of hardship.

Discussion Prompts

- How does knowing 29:11 was spoken to exiles facing seventy years change the way you lean on it?
- What is the difference between God’s promise of a good future and a promise of an easy life?
- Where do you most need to trust that God’s plans for you are good, even when the road is long?

Question 6

Student Question:

Many treat 29:11 as a guarantee of personal comfort and success, yet it was God's word to exiles who would wait a lifetime. How does anchoring your hope in God's larger, often slower, purposes guard you against both despair and shallow optimism?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question follows the great promise into daily life. The temptation when God's timing is slow is to swing between two ditches: despair, which gives up on God's good purposes, and shallow optimism, which demands relief now and collapses when it does not come.

Help students anchor hope where God anchors it: in His larger purposes and His faithful character, not in a guaranteed timetable of comfort. The exiles were sustained not by knowing exactly when relief would come, but by trusting the One who held their future.

Invite a specific season of waiting: a prayer long unanswered, a healing not yet come, a relationship still broken, a calling still unfulfilled. Ask, "What would change if you truly believed God has good plans here, even on His timetable rather than yours?"

Encourage patient, fruitful waiting rather than passive resignation. The exiles built houses and planted gardens while they waited. Hope in God's purposes frees us to live faithfully now, even before the promise is fully seen.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The two ditches of despair and shallow optimism in seasons of waiting.
- Hope anchored in God's character and larger purposes, not a guaranteed timetable.
- Fruitful, faithful living while we wait, not passive resignation.
- Trusting God's timing as much as God's promise.

Discussion Prompts

- In what area of life are you waiting on God right now?
- How does anchoring hope in God's purposes guard you from both despair and shallow optimism?
- What would faithful, fruitful waiting look like for you in that situation?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 29:12–14. God promises, "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart... I will restore your fortunes and gather you" (29:13–14). The return from exile was a real

event, yet it pointed beyond itself to a deeper restoration. How is this homecoming ultimately fulfilled in the spiritual restoration God accomplishes in Christ for His people, the true and spiritual Israel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 12–14 carry the promise deeper still. “You will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart... I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations... and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile” (29:12–14). The return is described as a gathering, a homecoming, the fruit of whole-hearted seeking.

Teach both horizons. The first horizon is real and historical: God did gather His people from Babylon and bring a remnant home. But the language reaches further than the return under Cyrus ever fulfilled. The full gathering of God’s scattered people, the deep restoration of His relationship with them, is accomplished in Christ.

Here the teacher must handle the question with care. The deepest fulfillment of this homecoming is not a future earthly kingdom for a political nation, but the spiritual restoration God works in Christ for His people, the true and spiritual Israel, the church. Paul teaches that the true Jew is one inwardly, by circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:28–29), and that not all who are descended from Israel belong to true Israel; the children of promise are counted as offspring (Romans 9:6–8). Those who belong to Christ are the “Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16).

Guard against the dispensational reading that sees here a guarantee of a regathered political Israel, a rebuilt temple, and a future earthly reign. The kingdom arrived with Jesus and was established at Pentecost (Daniel 2:44; Mark 9:1; Acts 2; Colossians 1:13). Christ reigns now, and the true homecoming is to be gathered into His church.

Land it on the personal promise woven through: “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart” (29:13). The God who gathers His exiles is the God who is found by those who seek Him wholeheartedly. The restoration the exiles longed for is ours, fully, in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The return from exile as a real event that points beyond itself to a deeper restoration (29:13–14).
- The spiritual restoration and gathering of God’s people fulfilled in Christ and His church.
- The church as the true and spiritual Israel (Galatians 6:16; Romans 2:28–29; 9:6–8).
- The kingdom established at Pentecost, with Christ reigning now (Daniel 2:44; Acts 2; Colossians 1:13).
- The danger of dispensational readings of a regathered political Israel, rebuilt temple, and future earthly reign.

Discussion Prompts

- How is the homecoming from exile fulfilled most deeply in Christ rather than in a future political kingdom?
- What does Scripture mean when it calls the church the true Israel of God?
- What does it mean to seek God “with all your heart,” and where is that seeking tested in your life?

Question 8

Student Question:

God promised, “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart” (29:13). What does whole-hearted seeking of God look like in your life right now, and where has your seeking become halfhearted or distracted?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question lifts out the personal promise of verse 13: “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.” God ties the finding to the seeking, and the seeking to the whole heart. Half-hearted, distracted seeking is the perennial disease of God’s people.

Help students examine the quality of their seeking. It is possible to pray without seeking, to attend without hungering, to know about God without seeking Him. Whole-hearted seeking is undivided, persistent, willing to set aside competing loves.

Name the rivals honestly. Our seeking grows halfhearted when it is crowded out by busyness, dulled by comfort, divided by idols, or discouraged by delay. The exiles were promised that God would be found by those who would seek Him with everything.

Move toward a concrete step. Ask each person to name one way their seeking of God has grown distracted, and one specific practice, of prayer, Scripture, repentance, that would press them toward seeking Him with the whole heart this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Whole-hearted seeking versus distracted, halfhearted seeking (29:13).
- The promise that God is found by those who truly seek Him.
- The rivals that divide our seeking: busyness, comfort, idols, discouragement.
- Concrete practices that rekindle wholehearted pursuit of God.

Discussion Prompts

- Where has your seeking of God grown halfhearted or distracted?
- What competing loves most often divide your heart?
- What is one practice that would help you seek God with your whole heart this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 29:15–32. False prophets like Shemaiah opposed Jeremiah's letter and tried to silence the true word of God, yet God declared He would judge them, for "he has spoken rebellion against the LORD" (29:32). How does this whole chapter display God's holiness in judging falsehood, His mercy in giving His exiled people a true word of hope, and His unwavering faithfulness to the covenant promises He fulfills at last in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest block of the lesson, and it gathers the whole chapter. The closing verses (29:15–32) show the conflict between Jeremiah's true word and the false prophets, climaxing with Shemaiah, who wrote letters from exile trying to silence Jeremiah and have him punished. God's verdict is stark: "I will punish Shemaiah... he has spoken rebellion against the LORD" (29:32). The whole chapter sets the true word of God against the comforting lies of men.

Teach God's holiness in judging falsehood. God will not let lies spoken in His name stand. The false prophets fed the exiles vain hope, opposed the truth, and sought to silence God's messenger, and God held them accountable. His holiness means He is jealous for the truth of His own word.

Teach God's mercy in the true word He gave. Even as He judges the liars, God's heart toward His exiled people is mercy. The whole letter is an act of love: He tells them the hard truth of seventy years, but He wraps it in the promise of a future and a hope, of being sought and found, of being gathered and restored. The truth, even when hard, is the kindest gift God gives a suffering people.

Now lift the chapter to its fulfillment in Christ. The covenant faithfulness on display here, God keeping His word across seventy years, is the same faithfulness that brings every promise to its yes in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). The return from exile was real, but it was a shadow of the greater homecoming. The deepest exile is the exile of sin, and the deepest return is the restoration God works in His Son, gathering His people into the church, the true Israel. The teacher should be careful here: this fulfillment is spiritual and present, not a future earthly kingdom for a political nation with a rebuilt temple. The kingdom has come; Christ reigns now (Colossians 1:13).

Close with worship. The God of this chapter is holy enough to judge every lie, merciful enough to send His grieving people a word of hope, and faithful enough to keep every promise, including the greatest promise of all, fulfilled when His Son brings His exiled people home.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's holiness in judging false prophets who speak lies in His name (29:32).
- God's mercy in giving His exiled people a true word of hope, even when it is hard.

- God's covenant faithfulness, keeping His word across seventy years and bringing every promise to its yes in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20).
- The return from exile as a shadow of the greater homecoming from the exile of sin, accomplished in Christ.
- The fulfillment as spiritual and present in the church, not a future earthly kingdom for a political nation (Colossians 1:13).
- The kindness of God in telling His people the truth rather than the comfortable lie.

Discussion Prompts

- How does God's judgment on false prophets reveal His jealousy for the truth of His word?
- How is the hard truth God gave the exiles actually an expression of His mercy?
- How does the return from exile point forward to the homecoming God gives us in Christ?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over this whole letter to the exiles, from the call to settle and bless Babylon, to the warning against false hope, to the promise of a future and a hope fulfilled in Christ. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is teaching you to live faithfully as a sojourner and to rest in His sure plans, even when the road home is long.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question moves the student from study to surrender. Look back over the whole letter: the call to settle and bless Babylon, the warning against false hope, the promise of a future and a hope, the call to seek God with the whole heart, the gathering and restoration fulfilled in Christ. Each is an invitation to be formed.

Resist letting this stay abstract. Press for one specific thing the Lord Jesus is doing: a place to bless rather than resent, a false hope to release, a season of waiting to entrust to God, a wholehearted seeking to renew.

Tie it explicitly to Christ. We are the true exiles, sojourners and strangers seeking a better, heavenly country (Hebrews 11:13–16). And we are the gathered ones, brought home from the exile of sin into the church of the living God. The future and the hope are not a slogan; they are a Person, and a place prepared.

Invite each person to name their “one thing” aloud or on paper, and to carry it into the week as a matter of prayer and obedience.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from knowledge to formation and obedience (James 1:22).
- The Christian as sojourner and exile seeking a better country (Hebrews 11:13–16).

- Resting in God's sure plans across long seasons of waiting.
- Christ as the one who brings His people home from the exile of sin.

Discussion Prompts

- Which theme of this letter is the Lord pressing on you most?
- What is one way you will live more faithfully as a sojourner this week?
- How does resting in God's sure plans change the way you face your current season of waiting?