



12

Seventy Years

Key Theme

- God is sovereign over all things.

Key Passages

- Jeremiah 25:1–14, 29:1–20; Daniel 1:1, 9:1–2

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify the length of the captivity of Judah in Babylon.
- Describe the prophecies Jeremiah made during the captivity.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, “Why is context so important?”

Students will practice the memory verse by completing the Memory Verse Review Sheet using the letter clues. If time allows, they will recite the verse to a partner or to the teacher using only the letter clues.

- Memory Verse Review Sheet for each student



Studying God's Word

God finally judged Judah through King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The survivors of the Babylonian attack were taken to Babylon to serve as slaves. However, God did not leave them without hope. God spoke through His prophet Jeremiah and revealed that the captivity would be 70 years and then their faithful God would return them home again.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Read through Jeremiah 25 and 29.
- Go Before the Throne.



Activity: Is Context King?

Students will examine two passages of Scripture that are typically used out of context and examine their own use of these verses.

- Student Guides
- Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the lesson key passages along with this background.

For years Jeremiah had issued warnings to the people of Judah. The lion from the north (Jeremiah 4:5–8), Babylon, would come and wipe out the nation. Judah was warned to repent of their evil ways. Jeremiah implored them to give up their false gods, so that God’s anger would not be provoked against them. Yet they did not listen to the Lord (Jeremiah 25:4–7). God’s anger was finally unleashed against them through King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. The day of judgment had come for Judah. In fact, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, burning the city and the Temple to the ground as well as destroying the city wall and killing many of the inhabitants (2 Kings 25:8–10). During this destruction, Jeremiah continued to be a key figure in the Jewish community along with two other prophets of God, Daniel and Ezekiel.

Up to this point, Jeremiah had served many different roles as a prophet of God. He proclaimed judgments against the kings and people of Judah (Jeremiah 2–4). He called the people to repentance (Jeremiah 4:14–18). He promised that God would not completely destroy them and would one day restore His people (Jeremiah 5:18).

Today, we will see that God required even more of His prophet, Jeremiah. God gave him words to speak concerning future events and to bring specific commands to God’s people (Jeremiah 29). Jeremiah brought these particular prophecies on behalf of God while the people were in captivity in Babylon.

The first prophecy concerning future events had to do with how long God’s people would be captive to the Babylonians. We read about this in Jeremiah 25. Jeremiah gave this prophecy in “the fourth year of Jehoiakim” (Jeremiah 25:1)—before Babylon’s initial invasion. Jeremiah recorded here for the first time that God would remove the voice of mirth and gladness from the people who would now serve the king of Babylon for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:10–11). Jeremiah also assured the people that when the 70 years of desolation were completed, Babylon would be judged for their iniquity (Jeremiah 25:12).

Once the captivity of Judah began, the people no doubt began to listen to and believe Jeremiah. The prophecies concerning their destruction by Babylon had occurred exactly as he had predicted, and the 70 years of captivity would surely follow. In fact, the prophet Daniel—himself a victim of the Babylonian deportation—confirmed his confidence in Jeremiah’s 70-year prophecy as evidenced by his own writing (Daniel 9:1–2). Another confirmation to this important prophecy appears in 2 Chronicles 36. The Scriptures mention that those who escaped the sword and were carried away to Babylon were made servants of that kingdom. And while they were captive, the land they left—Judah—would lay desolate for 70 years (2 Chronicles 36:20–21).

So God used Jeremiah to speak of the future—that the Jewish people would be captive in Babylon for 70 years. But God was also to use Jeremiah to instruct His people even as they lived as servants in Babylon. In a letter to the priests, the prophets, and all the people carried away by King Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah reminded the people that it was the Lord who caused them to be carried away as captives (Jeremiah 29:4). Because they would be there so long, God commanded them to build houses, plant gardens, take wives, and start families so they would continue to increase in number (29:5–6). This would set the foundation for a return to Jerusalem at the end of the 70 years—a godly remnant who would repopulate Jerusalem and continue the line that would ultimately lead to the Messiah.

God continued speaking to them through Jeremiah as a faithful Father would. God reassured His children that, after the 70 years were completed, He would indeed cause them to return to the land He had led them away from. The Lord was looking forward to restoring the worship in Jerusalem and to renewing the people in right worship (Jeremiah 29:10–14). The words of Jeremiah to the exiles were words of true hope, filled with the language of certainty—God *would* bring these things to pass.

God’s commands had been given, and the people had hope. But Jeremiah again had to give warning to the people in exile—warning against false prophets in their midst who strove to deceive the people with lies. These prophets claimed their dreams were of the Lord and dared to speak in His name. The Lord warned the people that these false prophets had not come in His

name (Jeremiah 29:8–9). The Lord advised that those prophets were not to be trusted or listened to. The false prophets would deal with the consequences—God’s punishment and curse (Jeremiah 29:21–32).

And so the people waited in hope—true hope—given to them by a proven prophet of God, Jeremiah. They would be led by God back to Jerusalem after the appointed time. They knew that throughout the entire history of Israel, God had been directing their steps. From calling Moses to lead the people out of Egypt to the installing of the first king—from the constant rebellions to the capture of Israel by the Assyrians and the capture of Judah by the Babylonians—God had been in control. God was orchestrating their lives and future through His providential care and sovereign grace.

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

If you walk into your local neighborhood Christian bookstore, you will likely find plaques and trinkets inscribed with Scripture. Often, there will be a single verse or even part of a verse with a picture. But what about the context of the passage? If we only read a verse or part of a verse, we have no context. We must be very careful to not make claims about a passage of Scripture that the author never intended or that would not be faithful to the true meaning of God’s Word.

One of the classic examples of taking a verse completely out of context is found in Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles. If you just read Jeremiah 29:11, you might think this is a wonderful promise to claim. God seems to be telling you that He has a wonderful plan for your life—a life of peace with a hopeful future.

So how do we know to whom this verse applies? If we apply the hermeneutical skills we have been using to examine Scripture, all we need to do is ask a few questions. Who is writing this letter? Jeremiah. Who is he writing to? The captives in exile in Babylon. Who is the *you* in verse 11? It is the captives mentioned in verse 4. When will this peaceful prospering begin? Only after 70 years of captivity in Babylon.

So why doesn’t anyone claim verse 10 as his life verse? What about verse 17? Could the Apostle Paul

have said that Jeremiah 29:11 characterized his life? While all of God’s Word is profitable for us (2 Timothy 3:16–17) and the things written in the Old Testament are for our instruction (Romans 15:4), not every verse applies directly to us today. We cannot simply insert our name into a verse wherever we want, nor can we deny a verse that clearly applies to us. We must look to rightly divide (accurately handle) God’s Word and faithfully present what it says (2 Timothy 2:15).

Other clear passages in Scripture talk about God’s plans for His children. Romans 8 clearly talks about God’s care and love for each believer and gives a firm promise that He will work all things together for good and conform them to the image of Christ until the day of their glorification (Romans 8:28–30). We have confident hope in the promises of God because of His faithful character. We have salvation from our sins because of what Christ has done on our behalf. And we have power to live our lives, whether in peaceful or tumultuous circumstances, through the Holy Spirit. As you teach this lesson, communicate the importance of trusting what God’s Word says and not adding our own ideas into the text.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Sovereign Lord, I am at once amazed at your patience and humbled by your justice when I study the way you dealt with Israel and Judah. My heart breaks as I consider the idolatry that Israel practiced after all you brought them through. Lord, the sin and idolatry in my culture are so similar to Israel’s. Sometimes I feel like the darkness of this world will swallow me up. Help me to be like Hezekiah—to hold fast to you. Thank you for the opportunity to teach this lesson to my class. May it bring light into the dark places in the lives of my students and their families. May our biographies say that we trusted in Jesus Christ, whose blood made us righteous, so that we were able to do what was right in the sight of the Lord even when life was hard and temptations came our way.

➤ **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





COME ON IN

- Write on the board, “Why is context so important?”
- Students will practice the memory verse by completing the Memory Verse Review Sheet using the letter clues. If time allows, they will recite the verse to a partner or to the teacher using only the letter clues.



Review

In our last lesson, we started looking at the period of captivity of Judah as a judgment of God for their continual idolatry.

- ? What details can you recall about the captivity based on our lesson? *Babylon, under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar, took Judah in three phases beginning in 607 BC. In 588, the Temple was burned and the walls of Jerusalem were torn down. All of the people other than a few poor laborers were taken captive to Babylon. Several kings were killed and made prisoners.*

God’s sovereignty is demonstrated in the timing and guiding of all of the events we talked about last week. He raised up Nebuchadnezzar to accomplish the judgment on Judah and sent His prophets to deliver messages of judgment, calls to repentance, and offers of hope for

the future—including the coming of the Messiah who would be the perfect King to rule His people.

Today we are going to look at several passages from Jeremiah and focus on three specific prophecies: the length of the captivity, instructions for the people in captivity, and the promise of a future hope and prosperity in their own land. Last week we saw a mention of a period of 70 years (2 Chronicles 36:21), and today we are going to flesh out that idea a bit more. We will be spending the next four lessons (not including the review) in this important period of time.



- Write on the board, “Why is context so important?”



Studying God’s Word

READ THE WORD

Jeremiah 25:1–14

Let’s read Jeremiah 25:1–14 together and begin to examine these ideas.
Choose students to read the passage aloud.

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? How long had Jeremiah been acting as a prophet? *23 years.*

- ? **When was this message delivered?** *The message came in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. This places the message at 607 BC as we discussed last week with the first phase of the Babylonian captivity.*

Keep your place in Jeremiah 25, and turn to Daniel 1:1. Read the verse as the students find it in their Bibles. We see here that Daniel identified these events as occurring in the third year of Jehoiakim. This difference can be reconciled in understanding that the Hebrew way of counting years included parts of the year of a king's reign while the Babylonian reckoning excludes the partial years. In either sense, this was the third full year of Jehoiakim's reign.

- ? **Turn back to Jeremiah 25. What did Jeremiah accuse the people of?** *They had refused to listen to him and the other prophets God had sent to call the people to repentance. The phrase "you have not listened" is repeated twice in verses 3 and 4.*
- ? **What specific charges did God bring against the people in verses 5–7?** *They had served and worshipped other gods, provoking God to anger.*
- ? **How did God describe Nebuchadnezzar?** *He is called God's servant.*
- ? **In what sense was Nebuchadnezzar a servant of God?** *God used him to bring judgment to Judah, so he was serving God's function for him. Similar language is used of other pagan kings, e.g., Cyrus in Isaiah 44–45.*
- ? **What did God promise to do to the land as a result of the disobedience of the people of Judah?** *He was going to send Babylon to make the land desolate and an astonishment.*

- ? **How long would this desolation last?** *70 years.*

Keep your place in Jeremiah 25, and turn to Daniel 9:1–2 and listen as I read those verses. Read the passage.

- ? **What books was Daniel referring to?** *He had copies of Jeremiah's writings with other Scriptures.*
- ? **How does this help us understand Jeremiah's prophecy?** *Daniel trusted Jeremiah's faithful proclamation of God's words concluding that the 70 years was about to be completed.*
- ? **How old would Daniel have been as he wrote these words?** *He was probably a teenager when he was taken captive to Babylon (Daniel 1:1–7). This means he was in his eighties in the first year of Darius.*
- ? **Turning back to Jeremiah 25, what would happen at the end of the 70 years?** *God would punish the Babylonians for their sins, even though He used them as instruments of judgment.*
- ? **What event from the past does this parallel?** *This is very much like the judgment God brought to the Assyrians, at the hands of the Babylonians, after the Assyrians conquered Israel in 721 BC. Their sins would not go unpunished. A parallel could also be drawn to the Israelites going into Egypt and coming out, with the Egyptian army being wiped out.*

Discover the Truth

SOVEREIGN

Through these events and the faithful proclamations of Jeremiah, we can clearly see the hand of God guiding the hearts of kings and the futures of His children. God is sovereign over the affairs of men. He had brought the people of Judah into captivity and He would lead them out. Not only that, but He would punish Babylon for its sins.

JUST

In all of this judgment, God was offering hope to His people. They had earned His just judgment for their idolatry, but He would not destroy them completely. If he wiped them out, there would be no hope of the Messiah coming to bear the sins of His people as Isaiah had clearly announced. If the line of David was eliminated, God could not fulfill His promise to bring the Ruler from the tribe of Judah to sit on David's throne forever.

GRACIOUS

As the people were being taken captive, they were given hope. God's grace is evident in this message of an end to the judgment and a coming restoration. It would only be 70 years until the restoration would come. Before we move on to look at the other two points delivered by Jeremiah, we are going to examine the idea of keeping things in their context, looking to the passage we will examine more closely after we finish the activity.





Is Context King?

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

Did you know that the Bible clearly states, “. . . there is no God”? If you don’t believe me, just turn to Psalm 53:1. Do you see it there?

This question and claim is intended to draw out the point that the context is crucial to understanding a verse.

- ? What major hermeneutical error have I just committed? *The phrase has been taken out of context.*

Context is extremely important in studying Scripture. We often use the phrase “context is king.” I am going to ask you to examine two passages that are commonly used by Christians and ask whether they are being used in a faithful way.

You will find the Is Context King? activity in your Student Guide. Answer the questions there and we will discuss your findings in a few moments. *Have the students work in pairs to answer the questions. If time is short, have the students work only on the Jeremiah 29:11 example.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

As you examined the Jeremiah 29 passage, you should have found that the promise was given to the people who had been taken captive and carried to Babylon (vv. 4, 20). Jeremiah wrote to them reminding them that God was judging them, but He wanted to give them hope. But that hope wouldn’t be realized until after 70 years of captivity.

When we hear this verse used in a modern context, we aren’t typically told that you can have this promise after 70 years of living as a captive in Babylon. Verse 11 gets ripped away from verse 10, and God’s Word gets twisted.

Another interesting point is that the promise is given to a group of people, not an individual—the “you” is plural and refers to all of the captives. Many of the people who heard this message would have died before the captivity was over, so those individuals did not receive the promise. In order to insert yourself into this verse, you have to change a plural pronoun into a singular pronoun. If verse 11 is a promise for you, then why don’t you want to accept verse 10 as a promise; only receiving your prosperity after 70 years of captivity? And why doesn’t anyone claim verse 17 as their life verse? *Pause for students to look at the verse.* They are promises to the same people, but we don’t tend to attach ourselves to the painful verses in Scripture.

- ? Did the young lady rightly handle God’s Word in delivering her speech? *No, but there are other passages of Scripture that could be used to clearly demonstrate the care that God has for His children.*
- ? Is there another verse she could have used to tell of God’s care for His children? *Romans 8, especially verses 28–39, offers a promise of God’s care for believers, regardless of their circumstances.*
- ? What about the use of Philippians 4:13? Is this a promise for an athlete to claim while on the field or in the ring? *No, the promise is about enduring suffering for the sake of Christ. Paul was speaking of facing uncomfortable situations for the sake of spreading the gospel. Socking somebody in the head does not advance the message of the gospel, so to apply this verse to a sporting contest is approaching blasphemy as it misrepresents God’s character.*

All of these ideas should be a solemn reminder of the responsibility we have to handle God’s Word accurately and represent His character and promises faithfully.



READ THE WORD

Let's read Jeremiah 29:1–20 together and try to get the big picture of the message God was sending to His people in Babylon and how He planned to restore them and give them hope. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

➤ Several of the kings are referred to by different names in the historical books.

- ? **How was God's message being delivered to His people?** *Jeremiah was writing a letter to be delivered to the people in captivity.*
- ? **Who was Jeconiah?** *This is an alternate name of Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:6-15), the king of the second deportation in 599 BC. He is also known as Coniah (Jeremiah 22:24, 28).*
- ? **When was this letter sent?** *It happened after the capture of Jeconiah/Jehoiachin, so it was sent after 599 BC.*
- ? **Who did God identify as the source of their captivity?** *God clearly said that He caused the captives to be carried away to Babylon in verses 4, 7, and 20.*
- ? **What instructions were given to the captives in verses 5–7?** *They were to build houses, plant gardens, raise and start families, and seek the peace of Babylon, praying to God for its prosperity.*
- ? **Why did God tell them to continue to growing their families?** *God intended for a large group to move back to Jerusalem. In order for a repopulation of Jerusalem, the people would need to continue having families.*
- ? **What warning was given about prophets in the midst of the people?** *God warned them to be wary of the false prophets among them in verses 8–9. In later verses, God called them by name and warned the people more specifically.*
- ? **How did God offer hope to His people in verses 10–14?** *God promised to bring the people back to Jerusalem and back to true worship, bringing them prosperity and a future in the Promised Land.*
- ? **What events were foretold in verses 15–20?** *God was going to send a third wave of destruction to the king and people remaining in Jerusalem.*
- ? **Why would this third wave come?** *Even in the midst of two deportations, the people were still not repentant and heeding the words of the prophets (verse 19).*

Discover the Truth

The rest of the letter goes on to detail some of the false prophets, telling the people to avoid them and listen to Jeremiah and true prophets, not those seeking their own gain. While there was still an announcement of continued and coming judgment, there was also hope. God brought them into captivity and God was going to bring them out. Jeremiah's words had been confirmed and there was no reason for the people to doubt that he was speaking clearly and on behalf of God.

Just as God had led Jacob's family into Egypt to become slaves so that He could show His kindness in bringing them out and prospering them in the Promised Land, God offered the captives hope of a return to Jerusalem. He told them to endure the 70 years and look forward with hopeful expectation of the restoration of their nation.



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

We have heard today how God, through the proclamations of Jeremiah, sovereignly directed the people into captivity and promised to lead them out. Jeremiah told the people to expect to be in captivity for 70 years, to continue to have families and be settled in Babylon, and that they were assured of a return, as a nation, to Jerusalem. There is a strange mixture of judgment and hope mixed in these passages.

We can surely draw a parallel to our experience in this world today. Although we live in a world that is cursed by God and suffering under the effects of sin and rebellion, we have a future hope of being restored to our true homeland. Just as God had set His love on the Israelites as His chosen people, He has set His love on all of us who are in Christ. Though we suffer now in this present place, we are assured of a future with King Jesus, dwelling with Him in a land where there is pure prosperity and a certain future with no sin, pain, suffering, or death. Just as Jeremiah called the captives to continue to live their lives while looking forward to the future restoration, so we can live in this present age and raise families and pray for God's blessing, all the while looking forward to heaven.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory (Colossians 3:1-4).

Let us seek to live our lives in light of God's faithfulness to His people in the past, knowing that His perfect character has secured for us, in Christ, the hope of heaven.

Colossians 3:1-4

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? We have looked at many interconnected pieces of Scripture in this lesson and the last. How do these intricate connections in different books of the Bible and the people described in its pages give you assurance of the truthfulness of Scripture? *Discuss various answers.*
- ? How can you use the faithfulness of God in fulfilling His promises, of judgment or restoration, as a source of hope? *Knowing that God is immutable, He will keep the promises He has given to His children. Seeing how He has fulfilled those promises in the past should give us assurance that He will fulfill promises made to Christians today. We can fully trust that He will complete His work in us until we meet Christ (Philippians 1:6).*
- ? After discussing the use of Jeremiah 29:11 and Philippians 4:13, how should you react when people use (or misuse) these verses, or others, in the future? *It is appropriate to bring correction to others, but it must be done with grace and truth. We are called to rightly handle God's Word and to speak the truth in love. Our goal should be to edify (build up) the other person with our words (Ephesians 4:29), not to tear them down and show them how wrong they are. Our motives should be carefully considered before we offer correction. Consider having the students model some sinful responses (e.g., "I can't believe you just used that verse to prove your point.") and some gracious responses (e.g., "When you used Jeremiah's words to offer hope, did you consider who those words were originally spoken to and what they meant to the author and audience?").*
- ? How does examining the Scripture in its historical context help you to understand God more fully and your place in the full scope of His redemptive history? *Discuss various answers.*
- ? How can you use what we have learned today to offer encouragement to other believers or to share the gospel with someone? *Discuss various answers, including the assurances of the accuracy of Jeremiah's prophecies and God's faithfulness to bring judgment and restoration.*



MEMORY VERSE

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, everyone, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Praise God for His sovereignty—that He is in control of the affairs of this world.
- Thank God for His faithfulness—that we can trust Him to be faithful to us as He was to His people thousands of years ago.
- Ask Him for opportunities to share the gospel this week with friends, family, and strangers.