

A Future and a Hope?

A Godly Response to a Pandemic – Part 8

Series Overview

Proverbs 27:1 says, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.” The COVID-19 outbreak certainly shows that this is true. When 2020 began, we had no idea we would face this new kind of challenge. Though it caught us by surprise, we know God was not surprised. He knew this would happen and will guide us through this challenging time.

This study guide is the second in a new Faith Baptist Bible study series called “A Godly Response to a Pandemic.” Each lesson will provide biblical teaching that enables us to think, feel, and live in a Christlike way throughout this pandemic experience.

Together, we’ll tackle topics like fear, anxiety, and loneliness. We’ll also examine our behavior as a church. Most importantly, we’ll learn about our loving, sovereign God who is all-knowing, almighty, always present, and trustworthy in every way.

Series Guidelines

This series will continue throughout our period of “social isolation” in New York City. To participate, please take the following approach.

1. A new study guide will be provided each Saturday at Shepherd Thoughts. You can follow the guide online or download and print it as a PDF.
2. Use each guide for an in-home Bible study from 9:30-10:30 a.m. on Sunday.
3. If you live with a Christian family, you can study together. If not, try studying together with another believer from Faith by phone or internet using a service like Facebook Video Chat, Google Hangouts, Skype, or Zoom.
4. For each study: (1) begin with prayer, (2) read the Scripture passage, (3) work through the study guide, then (4) end with prayer.
5. Then tune in early to the Faith Baptist Livestream on Facebook at 10:45 a.m. to post questions, feedback, and comments about the lesson. Pastor Overmiller will respond to your feedback before the 11:00 a.m. service begins.
6. You can also leave comments on the blogsite at the end of the study guide page and Pastor Overmiller will respond by sometime Sunday.
7. As a bonus, memorize a verse or more from the passage and think about it throughout the week ahead.

Lesson Introduction

As we go through this pandemic together, a common tendency surfaces among us. We turn to popular Bible verses that seem to apply to our situation or appear to say what we really want to hear – verses that sound positive, poetic, and uplifting.

Jer 29:11 is a verse like this: “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.” We jump to the conclusion that these soothing words mean: “If I pray to God, then I’ll be healed from my sickness, get a good job, and enjoy a happy marriage.”

However, that’s not what this verse means. This fly-over interpretation is clouded by our Western, first-world priorities of comfort and convenience, and the materialistic, temporal values of the so-called “American Dream.” It reveals an instant “fast food” perspective of life faith that resists the kind of faith that’s forged in the fires of time and difficulty. It also reveals a wrong approach to Bible study – or a lack of study altogether.

Now, this verse does teach us life-changing truth, but not how we first imagine. To understand this verse accurately so it can shape our faith and equip us to navigate trials in a God-glorifying way, let’s take a closer look together to see what it really has to say.

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.

Study Guide

Consider the Background

The prophet Jeremiah wrote these words from God as part of a letter. He sent this letter to Jews who had recently been taken as prisoners and captives to Babylon (Jer 29:1, 4). This captivity and removal from their homeland had occurred because of their persistent disobedience to God as a nation. In this letter, Jeremiah guaranteed that their captivity would last for 70 years. He offered them no fast way out and no hope of an earlier release.

Ask Yourself Some Questions

- If you were an Israelite who has recently been forcibly removed from your home and forced to relocate to a foreign land, how would you feel about God and your life?
- How would you respond to Jeremiah the prophet’s message that your difficult situation was going to last for 70 years?

Examine the Scripture

- What did other prophets have to say about Israel’s predicament (Jer 28:2, 11)?
- What did God say about these prophets and their “positive” predictions (Jer 28:15-17; 29:8-9)?

Ask Yourself a Question

Why do we prefer people who bring us positive (but dishonest) news over people who bring us difficult (but truthful) news?

Examine the Scripture

Jeremiah wrote this letter to encourage the Israelites to accept their circumstances rather than look for a way to escape. He encouraged them to settle down in the foreign cities where they'd been placed – to build houses, plant gardens, marry, raise children, and contribute to the economic progress of the cities they were placed in (Jer 29:5-8). Why? Because they'd contribute to their well-being and prosperity during captivity (Jer 29:8).

Ask Yourself a Question

- How does being adaptable in difficult situations deepen our faith in God?
- How does our desire for instant success and deliverance from our problems handicap our spiritual growth and limit our perspective of God and his ways?

Examine the Scripture

- How long is a biblical lifespan according to Moses (Psa 90:10)?
- Based upon Jeremiah's prophecy to the Israelites entering captivity (Jer 29:11-13), would adults who were just beginning the 70-yr. period be able to expect that they would return to Israel and resume "life as normal" in their lifetimes?

This fact helps us recognize that this promise did not guarantee that "everything would turn out great" during the lifetime of the adult Israelites who received this promise from Jeremiah. The "future and hope" that Jeremiah foretold was for the next generation, for the children who entered captivity and the children who would be born during that time.

Ask Yourself a Question

If you were an Israelite, how would you feel if you knew that you would likely die in captivity and never get to return to your homeland in this lifetime?

Examine the Scripture

- Though God would eventually return the next generation of Israelites to their homeland, what more important goal would he accomplish through this ordeal (Jer 29:11-14)?
- Though we are not the Israelites who went into captivity in Babylon and God hasn't given us a specific timeline for our current trial(s), what can we learn from Jeremiah 29:11 and the details surrounding this verse (see Rom 15:4)? (In other words, how can we apply it to our lives in a responsible, accurate, and well-informed way as New Testament Christians?)

Conclusion

Here are six possible ways to apply the truth of this Bible verse to our lives today. Can you think of another way, too?

1. When we go through hard times, we can trust that God is working out a larger, long-range plan that reaches far beyond our present discomfort. This is an especially appropriate application when our difficulties are the result of our wrong choices or the

wrong choices of someone in our lives (or perhaps even the collective sins of our church, our nation, or world).

2. Unlike Israel, we don't have the luxury of knowing in advance the timespan of God's long-range plan. In some cases, we might get some resolution within our lifetime. In other cases, a resolution may not occur until a later generation. No matter what, these verses remind us to rest in God's care and to follow his guidance in Scripture, regardless of whether this patient approach leads to favorable experiences today.
3. We should give ourselves wholeheartedly to our work and roles in this world. Don't bail out and withdraw ourselves from contributing to the prosperity of our employer or nation. By giving our best, we end up benefiting our community and world for God's glory and their benefit, and we benefit ourselves and our families as well.
4. Disregard appealing voices that guarantee prolific material prosperity and insist that immediate deliverance is a sign of God's approval and is always God's intent. Like the false prophets who challenged Jeremiah, false teachers damage the faith of God's people today. God doesn't always guarantee deliverance from circumstantial suffering, but he does provide comfort and hope for any situation.
5. Foster a close relationship with God. If you have never been born again, then you should turn to Christ as your God and Savior and place your complete trust in him today. You don't have to wait for decades to call out to God for salvation. If you've already begun to follow Jesus, then nurture a growing closeness with God through faithful obedience and prayer.
6. Rest in hope knowing that many Bible prophecies point ahead to a still-future time when God will finalize his triumph over all evil, establish a perfect kingdom that will last forever, and remove all vestiges of evil. This future hope should not make us restless today, but it should enable us to accept our current, less fortunate circumstances because God knows what he's doing, and the end result is certain.

Share Your Feedback

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