

Submit to Babylon  
Jeremiah 27 + 29, Hebrews 12

Turn to Jeremiah 21 please. We'll look at four Scriptures today, three in Jeremiah, one in Hebrews. This is a sermon for those who have troubles that are not going away.

Some troubles don't last long, they are intense but short. But sometimes we have difficulties, trials, hardships, distress, and it's not getting better. Not going away. We prayed and trusted and prayed and begged, and tried some prayer tricks to get God to come through, and God cannot be manipulated, and it's not getting better.

Sometimes, our troubles are like Babylon. That's what Hebrews 12 tells us, and that's where we'll end. We should submit to it and endure it. It is part of God's plan, and he still has a very good future in mind. But the present is painful. Is there a Babylon in your life? I don't know. I've had Babylon in my life. Maybe there is a Babylonian army in your life.

Jerusalem was being sieged by the Babylonian army. All the people that lived in towns around Jerusalem were in the city, because it was the only safe place. Jerusalem was hoping for a rescue that was not coming. Jeremiah had a word from the Lord for them.

The Way of Life and the Way of Death

*Jer 21:8-10 "Jeremiah, tell the people in Jerusalem, 'This is what the Lord says: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. <sup>9</sup> Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague. But whoever goes out and surrenders to the Babylonians who are besieging you will live; they will escape with their lives. <sup>10</sup> I have determined to do this city harm and not good, declares the Lord. It will be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will destroy it with fire.'*

Surrender to the Babylonians who are besieging you, and you will live; stay in Jerusalem and you will die. God has decided to destroy it by giving to the Babylonians. "But you people in it can live," says God. "Leave the city and surrender to the Babylonians, and you will live," says God. "I want you to live, not die. But don't stay in the city, because I will see it burned."

You can imagine how popular that message made Jeremiah, living in the besieged city with all the rest. They thought he was a coward, a traitor, a friend of Babylon, and that he lacked faith in God. Jeremiah was imprisoned for this message, and they nearly killed him. But that was God's message, and Jeremiah made it clear.

I'm not saying that all our troubles are like this. Not at all. But some are. Paul's thorn in the flesh was like this. Pain that God knows all about, and he has not turned his back at all, though it seems like it. Sometimes he wants to see us through, guide us through, and it won't end quickly.

Who Rules the Earth? The Lord Almighty, God of Israel.

Jer 27:3 *Then send word to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon...<sup>4b</sup> ‘This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: <sup>5</sup> “With my great power and outstretched arm, I made the earth, and its people, and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please. Get that. God made it all, and he still controls it all, and he gives management to anyone he pleases. Daniel 4:32; 5:21.*

*<sup>6</sup> Now I will give all your countries into the hands of my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him. <sup>7</sup> All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for (judging) his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him.*

How does an evil person come to rule a world power? Because God gives the nations to anyone he pleases. Nebuchadnezzar was a greedy, arrogant pagan, and God said, “I give all your countries into the hands of my servant Nebuchadnezzar. He will rule, and his son and grandson after him, and then it’s over for Babylon.” Why is God like this? Not sure, but he is.

*<sup>8</sup> ““If, however, any nation or kingdom will **not** serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the sword, famine and plague, declares the Lord, until I destroy it by his hand.*

*Jer 27:11 But if any nation **will** bow its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let that nation remain in its own land to till it and to live there, declares the Lord.””*

‘If you will not serve him, or bow your neck under his yoke, I the Lord Almighty will punish you with sword, famine, and plague. But if you will bow your neck under his yoke, and serve him, I will let you stay on your own land to till it and live there,’ declares the Lord. The Babylonians will rule. God has decided. But he would like it not to be harder on people than it needs to be.

*<sup>12</sup> I, Jeremiah, gave the same message to Zedekiah king of Judah. I said, “Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; serve him and his people, and you will live. <sup>13</sup> Why will you and your people die by the sword, famine and plague with which the Lord has threatened any nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? <sup>14</sup> Do not listen to the words of the prophets who say to you, ‘You will not serve the king of Babylon,’ for they are prophesying lies to you. <sup>15</sup> ‘I have not sent them,’ declares the Lord. ‘They are prophesying lies in my name.*

It was the same for God’s people as for the nations without God. Bow your neck, surrender to the Babylonians, and you will live. If you don’t, the Lord promises sword, famine, and plague.

It does not seem that anyone listened to Jeremiah. There were many other prophets saying happier things. The king did not listen to Jeremiah, nor did anyone else. No one surrendered to the Babylonians. So they died by sword, famine, and plague.

There is message for us about national leaders. God gives the nations to whomever he pleases. God has given power to some awful people, miserable rulers, humanly speaking they are a disaster. They are as bad as we think, but before God it is not out of control.

He has allowed it, for his own reasons, and he will end it when the time he gave them is up. The Lord Almighty, God of Israel, gives the nations to whomever he pleases, for their allotted time, and then he gives it to others.

### Jeremiah's Letter to the Exiles

Babylon took Jewish exiles back to Babylon three different times, all around the year 600BC, three times in about 18 years, once in 605, again in 598, and then in 587 after they destroyed the city and the temple. Jeremiah wrote this letter to Jewish exiles in Babylon after Babylon had already done this twice. Jewish exiles had been living five or ten years in Babylon.

Those exiles in Babylon knew that the city of Jerusalem was still standing, and worship was ongoing in the temple, and they longed to go back to Jerusalem. They had prophets there in Babylon who said, "Yes, for sure, God is about to destroy Babylon, and you'll all be able to go back." "No," said Jeremiah, "that's not how it will be."

And I want you to see that since Christ, exiles living in Babylon is what the church is in the world. We are little pockets of Jerusalem living in Babylon. Followers of Christ in Canada are God's covenant people, foreigners and exiles, and Canada is Babylon. Submit, endure.

*Jer 29:1 This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon....<sup>4</sup> This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon (all the followers of Christ in Canada):<sup>5</sup> "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.<sup>6</sup> Marry, and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.<sup>7</sup> Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."<sup>8</sup> Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have."<sup>9</sup> They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the Lord.*

Submit to the Babylonians. Followers of Christ in Canada: "Make yourselves at home, plant gardens, settle down, live life there. Pray for the peace and prosperity of the godless idol-worshippers around you, because if they prosper, so will you."

<sup>10</sup> *This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. <sup>11</sup> For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Notice, they have to wait 70 years before God’s plans start. 70 years first. Long wait.)*

<sup>12</sup> *Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. <sup>13</sup> You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. (And after the 70 years is over, then, finally, you people will get interested in me, then you will call on me, and then you will come and pray to me, and seek me. You’re not doing that now, but you will then.) And THEN:*

<sup>14</sup> *I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.*

What have we seen in Jeremiah so far?

God was using the Babylonians to teach the Jews a hard lesson. They counted on God protecting the city, they counted on God protecting his temple, they counted on God taking care of the their king in David’s line.

But they did not seek God, and they did not live in his ways, so God made the Babylonians his servant, and God used the Babylonians to destroy the city of Jerusalem, destroy the temple, and take David’s line of kings off the throne.

God did not want to destroy the people. He gave them ways to survive, to live, he coached them on making the best of this, urged them to choose life not death.

But the people could not accept that God’s hand was behind the Babylonians. The Babylonians were evil, arrogant, immoral idol-worshippers, which was all true. So of course they could never bow their necks to the yoke of such an evil force, or serve them.

They thought loyalty to God meant they must resist as long and hard as possible; but that was wrong, God wanted something else, and their resistance added to their troubles.

The Lord’s Discipline – Hebrews 12

Let’s go now to Hebrews 12. Hebrews 12 is closer to this than anything else in the New Testament, it seems to me. Hebrews 12 is about God’s discipline. I said at the start that this was a sermon for those who have troubles that are not going away. That’s what Hebrews 12 is about.

We must get something clear about Hebrews 12. This is important: When we think about parents disciplining their children, we assume the child is doing something wrong, the child is misbehaving in some way, and needs correction.

Hebrews 12 is indeed a parent disciplining children, but Hebrews 12 never assumes the child is doing something wrong. There are reasons for the discipline, but in Heb 12 it is not the child's failure to act properly. The Jews were attacked by the Babylonians because they failed to live in God's ways. No doubt about that. But in Hebrews 12, we don't read about any such failure.

In Hebrew 12, the discipline is more like athletic training, where the coach makes the athlete go through all kinds of long unpleasant workouts and practice in order to make them better. Basic military training is another example. It's very difficult, everyone hates it, but the army trains this way so soldiers will survive! As Jeremiah told the Jews, submit to God's plan.

### Endure and Submit

Heb 12:4-13 *In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.* <sup>5</sup> *And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his child? It says, "My child, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,"* <sup>6</sup> *because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his child."* <sup>7</sup> *Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?* <sup>8</sup> *If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.* <sup>9</sup> *Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live!* <sup>10</sup> *They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.* <sup>11</sup> *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.* <sup>12</sup> *Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.* <sup>13</sup> *"Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.*

Our troubles make us think that God has left us, that he's turned away, that he's not paying attention, that he does not love us. We forget. Let's not forget his encouragement.

Is there not a way we could hurry this up? Could we not just learn whatever lesson we should learn, and then the trouble would end, and we could move on? No, that's not how this training works. God is not teaching us a lesson. Rather, he's changing us.

If we have long severe trouble, and we keep trust God as we are able, and living in his ways as we are able, **we are changing**. That change is what God is after. We will figure some things out along the way, but that's not the point. Athletic training and military training build things into people, they change people, how people think and act. That's what God is doing.

He's building his priorities into us. We don't see the change, and that's fine. God knows what he's doing, and he's succeeding. Our part is just to keep trusting him and living in his ways. He accomplishes the rest.

Let's summarize Hebrews 12:

These words are God's encouragement to his children.  
Don't say the troubles are meaningless, and don't lose heart.  
God's discipline means God loves us, and receives us.  
Endure it as God's training; it means God is treating you as his own son or daughter.  
If you were not being trained in this way, it would mean you were not really God's child.  
We respected human fathers, who trained us for a little while.  
Let's submit to our spiritual Father, who gives us life.  
These troubles are for our own good; God wants us to share in his holiness, and he will succeed.  
Of course discipline is painful while it is happening. But the harvest lasts a long, long, time.  
Our troubles are God's way of making us like him: righteous and peaceful.  
So stay on the narrow path, keep living in God's ways.  
Don't drag, don't quit, don't wander from God's ways, keep trusting God and obeying him.  
Stay on God's path, so you don't go lame, but instead become strong.  
Let's make sure we take this to heart, my brothers and sisters. Let's make sure we tell ourselves and each other this, when we are actually thinking and believing something different. If we will not take hold of this, and live this way, we are too much the like Jews who would not surrender to the Babylonians and serve them. Here's that summary again:

**PRAYER:**

Thank you, God, for all the things this world cannot take away.  
Thank you, God, that you never leave us or forsake us.  
Thank you that your hand always guides us, and your right hand always holds us fast.  
Thank you that our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us a great eternal glory.  
Thank you that you are training us because you love us.  
Thank you that you are always the perfect parent.  
Thank you that you're making sure we will share in your holiness.  
Thank you that you are able to keep us from falling,  
and bring us blameless and joyful into your presence.  
Thank you that even though we go through the darkest possible valleys,  
you are with us, to guide and protect and comfort us.  
Thank you that we are companions with each other, brothers and sisters,  
in the trouble and kingdom and endurance that we all have in Jesus.  
Lord Jesus, thank you that you pray for us, and that the Holy Spirit prays for us.  
Thank you that to be absent from the body is to be present with you, Lord.  
Thank you that the dead in Christ will rise first, and then we who remain will be caught up with  
them, and then we will all be with you, Lord, forever.  
Thank you God that we will see your face, and we will be with you, and you will be with us,  
and you will wipe away every tear, and there will be no more night.  
Thank you for all the things this world cannot take away.