

# TO BUILD OR NOT TO BUILD

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When God began to send the children of Judah into captivity in Babylon (605-586 B.C.), He used three of Israel's greatest prophets to accomplish very different but important works. God had already been using Jeremiah to prophesy to the people in the city of Jerusalem and he would continue that work up to and even after the point when the city was destroyed by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. Young Daniel was among the very first captives taken to Babylon and he would accomplish God's work among the rulers of Babylon and Persia for almost a hundred years. Finally, God sent the prophet Ezekiel to work among the Israelites who were captives in Babylon. For both the Israelites remaining in Jerusalem and those who went to Babylon, an important question faced them as to whether or not to build houses. Interestingly, God used Jeremiah to answer this question for the Israelites in Babylon, and Ezekiel to answer it for the Israelites in Jerusalem.

## **The people of Jerusalem should *not* build**

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel had to deal with false prophets who contradicted their words. While the true prophets warned of the coming destruction and punishments, the false prophets promised "peace, peace" (Jer 6:14; 8:11; Ezek 13:15-16). Through Jeremiah, God warned the people: "*Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord. They say still unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you*" (Jer 23:16-17). In Ezekiel chapter 11, Ezekiel was taken in the spirit to the east gate of the temple in Jerusalem where 25 of the princes of Judah were by the door. God told Ezekiel, "*Son of man, these are the men that devise mischief, and give wicked counsel in this city: which say, It is not near; let us build houses: this city is the caldron, and we be the flesh*" (Ezek 11:2-3). These princes of Judah were telling the people of Jerusalem that God's promised judgment was not near, and that they should build houses. As the meat is protected by and remains in the pot, the people of Jerusalem believed that they were safe and secure in their city and that nothing would remove them from it.

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Thus, the Lord said to them, “For I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them. Ye have multiplied your slain in this city, and ye have filled the streets thereof with the slain. Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Your slain whom ye have laid in the midst of it, they are the flesh, and this city is the caldron: *but I will bring you forth out of the midst of it. Ye have feared the sword; and I will bring a sword upon you, saith the Lord God. And I will bring you out of the midst thereof, and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and will execute judgments among you*” (Ezek 11:5-9). Jerusalem would not be a protective pot for the people (Ezek 11:11). The only ones who would remain there were the dead. Therefore, it was *not* a time for these people to build houses.

## **The people in Babylon should build**

As the false prophets of Jerusalem promised the people there that that they would remain there a long time and should therefore build houses, the false prophets in Babylon promised the people there that they would only be there for a short time and therefore should not build houses. God inspired Jeremiah to write a letter to those false prophets in Babylon and to all the captives there (Jer 29:1-3). In Jeremiah’s letter, God told the captives, “*Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them*” (Jer 29:5), because the captivity was not going to be short like the false prophets were saying. God said, “*Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the Lord. For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place*” (Jer 29:8-10). The captivity would last for 70 years! That is why Jeremiah wrote, “*This captivity is long: build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them*” (Jer 29:28). In both cases, the right answer to the question of whether or not to build houses was to believe whatever God said and obey His commandments. If they had done that in the first place, they would all have remained safe in Jerusalem and would never have faced God’s judgments that came upon them.