



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V23 N2 January 10, 2021

RIGHTSIDE UP

“Exhortation for Exiles”

Jeremiah 29:1-14

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Life Purpose

I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in his kingdom purposes for his glory.

“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.”

Acts 20:24



How are we to live as aliens in the world?

According to the Central Belief Life Purpose, our purpose in life is to participate in God's kingdom purposes—for his glory, rather than our own. In the Old Testament, these purposes, rooted in his promises to Abraham (Ge 12:2-3; 15:17-20) and to David (2Sa 7:11b-16; Ps 89:3-4, 29, 34-37), pertain to his people Israel. In the New Testament, his purposes pertain to the Church, the body of Christ (Mt 28:18-20; Ac 1:8). At a bare minimum, participating in God's purposes entails recognizing what he is doing and submitting to our role in it—regardless of the generation in which we live.

This is exactly what God asked his people to do through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 29:1-14). At the time, they were living in an unenviable position as exiles in Babylon. Their homeland, the southern kingdom of Judah that once belonged to the divided nation of Israel before the northern kingdom was overrun by the Assyrians in 721 B.C., had been invaded a few years earlier in 586 B.C. during the reign of Zedekiah, not by the Assyrians but by the Babylonians, and its capital, Jerusalem, had been razed. This evil came upon Judah because the nation had disobeyed the covenant God made with them through Moses, which was a *conditional* covenant that promised blessings for obedience but curses for disobedience (see Dt 28). In fact, Israel's banishment from their land should have come as no surprise, since it had been anticipated by Moses himself in Deuteronomy 29:22-28. Then in Jeremiah 25:4-7, 11, the prophet confirmed what Moses had anticipated. Jeremiah writes:

“And though the LORD has sent all his servants the prophets to you again and again, you have not listened or paid any attention. They said, ‘Turn now, each of you, from your evil ways and your evil practices, and you can stay in the land the LORD gave to you and your ancestors for ever and ever. Do not follow other gods to serve and worship them; do not arouse my anger with what your hands have made. Then I will not harm you. But you did not listen to me,’ declares the LORD, ‘and you have aroused my anger with

what your hands have made, and you have brought harm to yourselves . . . This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.’”

But Israel's history was not destined to end in exile for the LORD promised to bring his people back to their land after the seventy years of captivity had finished. The *conditional* Mosaic Covenant guaranteed future *judgment*; the *unconditional* Abrahamic covenant, which promised to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation and give them the land, and the *unconditional* Davidic covenant, which promised to establish David's dynasty and right to rule over an everlasting kingdom, guaranteed future *blessing*. In Jeremiah 29:10-11, the prophet confirmed what the unconditional promises had anticipated. Jeremiah writes:

“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. 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.’”

In the meantime, the exiles were to accept the will of God for them as revealed through the prophets and were to settle down for the duration. One commentator writes: “The people are not to rebel against the authority of Babylon because, in effect, it is the authority of God over them for a prescribed time. More positively, the people are to seek the prosperity of Babylon because it will affect them as well. Most important, they are to pray for their captors” (J. Andrew Dearman, *The NIV Application Commentary: Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 262). Daniel and his friends illustrate the kind of lives the exiles were to live. Daniel remained faithful to the law, resolving “not to defile himself with the royal food and wine” (Da 1:8), while obeying the king's demand by eating “nothing but vegetables” and drinking “nothing but water” (v. 12) and trusting God for the outcome. We can follow the same principles as the exiles in our walk as aliens.



EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

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. 2 (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) 3 He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said:

4 This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 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. 7 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." 8 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. 9 They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the LORD.

10 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. 11 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. 12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. 14 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."

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle "surviving" in v. 1.
- Bracket "carried into exile" in v. 1.
- Circle "Jehoiachin" in v. 2 and "Zedekiah" in v. 3.
- Underline "Elasah" and "Gemariah" in v. 3.
- Underline "I carried" in v. 4.
- Bracket "Increase in number there; do not decrease" in v. 6.
- Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 7.
- Circle "you" in vv. 10-15.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Jeremiah 29:1-14 contains the text of a letter. Identify the sender, the recipients, and its destination.

 2. Describe the *historical* circumstances leading up to sending the letter.

 3. *Summarize* what the writer asks his readers to do in verses 5-6.

 4. Isn't doing what the LORD commands (v. 7) unprecedented and unreasonable? Explain.

 5. Unpack the theology of "I have carried you into exile" (v. 7).

 6. Nevertheless, obedience to his command makes sense. How so?

 7. Interpret the LORD's warning in verses 8-9.

 8. If verses 11-14 are addressed to the exiles, what do they have to do with Christians?

 9. Has the promise of verse 14 been fulfilled? Explain.

 10. **Discussion:** Talk about what living like "exiles and aliens" looks like today.
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Commentary On The Text

Jeremiah sent a letter to the exiles from Judah who were taken into exile when Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem in 597 B.C. It was the second deportation, the one when Jehoiachin was king (2Ki 24:8-18; 2Chr 36:9-10). The letter was written sometime later and sent in a diplomatic mail bag. One commentator explains: “The Babylonian Chronicle hints at internal troubles in Babylon in 595/4 B.C. in which some of the deported Jews seem to have been involved. At least two were executed by Nebuchadnezzar (29:21-22). The fact that Jeremiah’s letter was sent by official envoys from Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar fits well with a date of 594 B.C. when Zedekiah may have been obliged to report on recent events in Judah and to reaffirm his loyalty” (J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT, 544). Otherwise, the envoys were simply conducting routine business between a vassal and his overlord – communication from one country to another was not uncommon at that time. The letter was addressed to *survivors*, namely, to those who survived either the rigors of the earlier deportation or the results of the rebellion hinted at in verses 21-22.

It’s not the letter itself but its *substance* that is remarkable. Verses 4-7 contain the prophet’s radical advice regarding how his readers are to live as displaced aliens – advice which was altogether contrary to the advice given them by their prophets in Babylon. Consider their plight: “The exiles had lost everything but their lives and what few possessions they could carry with them to Babylon. They’d lost their freedom and were now captives. They’d been taken from their homes and had lost their means of making a living. They were separated from relatives and friends, some of whom may have perished in the long march from Jerusalem to Babylon. No matter how they looked at it, their situation seemed hopeless” (Warren W. Wiersbe, *OT Commentary: Jeremiah*, Be Decisive, 140). In the midst of their desperate situation, they were no doubt shocked to receive this unprecedented advice from the prophet: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 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” (vv. 5-6). In other words, accept your fate from the hand of your sovereign God, and abandon any hope you might have in a “holy revolt” against Babylon (cf., 27:11, 17). All the while that false prophets propagated the *popular lie* that their stay would be a short one, Jeremiah propagated the *unpopular truth* that the ones the LORD carried into exile (v. 4) would likely not live to see him bring them back.

More radical still, and unprecedented in the literature of antiquity, was the advice Jeremiah gave in verse 7. The exiles were to “seek the peace and prosperity” of the city to which they were carried, most likely Nippur, the region where other conquered exiled groups were also relocated (Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Word*

Biblical Commentary, vol. 27, *Jeremiah* 26-52, 71), and were to “pray to the LORD for it” (the only place where prayer for one’s enemies is commended in the Old Testament). And while Jeremiah’s advice was hard for the exiles to swallow, it made good sense. After all, if the LORD answered their prayers and prospered their city, they, too, would prosper.

Verses 8-9 contain a warning. The exiles were to ignore false prophets who were prophesying lies in the LORD’s name. The theme of their prophecies was always the same: a speedy return to the homeland. As one commentator quips, “Rosy pictures were the stock in trade of the falsifiers” (Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 198). But a two-year exile would have amounted to no more than a cruelly pointless march and countermarch void of God’s intentions for Babylon and for his people.

The letter’s tone abruptly changed in the next paragraph. In verses 10-14 the LORD revealed what he had in store for the exiles. The story of God’s covenant people would not end with them in Babylon. God had plans to prosper his people; he had plans for their future (v. 11). When their seventy-year sentence ended, he would bring them back to the Promised Land, that is, the land he promised to give to Abraham and his descendants forever. And when they did return, divine discipline would have run its course and accomplished its purpose. In the words of one commentator, “Those who returned would be, for all their faults, pioneers zealous for the purity of Israel” (Derek Kidner, *The Message of Jeremiah*, TBST, 100).

Just as there were three deportations (under Jehoiakim in 605 B.C., Jehoiachin in 597 B.C., and Zedekiah in 586 B.C.), there were also three returns (under Zerubbabel in 536 B.C., Ezra in 458 B.C., and Nehemiah in 444 B.C.). But these were merely down payments, sequential partial fulfillments of what God ultimately has in store. In the first place, not all of the exiles returned to their land in these returns. In the second place, neither during nor following the three returns did Judah regain its sovereignty. It remained under Persian control, and later under Greek and then Roman control. And finally, no descendant of David has ruled over a sovereign *united* kingdom of Israel since the tenth century B.C., and not over a sovereign *solitary* kingdom of Judah since the fifth century B.C. What God promised through Jeremiah awaits a complete fulfillment in the future.

While verse 11 is often taken out of context and used to encourage individual Christians today, God made this promise to the exiles living in Babylon in the sixth century B.C. What’s more, the promise was made to them not as *individuals* but as a *people* and is based on the unconditional covenants he made previously with Abraham and David. That does not mean the promise has no relevance to Christians today. Still, it should not be directly applied to *individual* Christians. Its relevance has to be inferred in a new context, the context of the new covenant, the church, the future return of Jesus Christ and kingdom hope of God’s people today.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 1 *surviving* I.e., those who had not succumbed to the rigors of deportation. "Those elders may be ones who survived the journey to Babylon, were still living since arriving there, or were those who had not been executed by Nebuchadnezzar" (F. B. Huey, Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, NAC, 251).

v. 1 *carried into exile* There were three deportations from Judah—the first in 605 B.C. when Jehoiakim was king. Shortly after defeating the allied Assyrian and Egyptian forces at Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, conquered some of the cities and took some of the nobles, including Daniel, as exiles to Babylon (Da 1:1-7; 2Ki 24:1; 2Chr 26:6-7). The second occurred in 597 B.C. when Jehoiachin was king (2Ki 24:8-18; 2Chr 36:9-10). That time Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, "removed the treasures from the temple of the Lord and from the royal palace" (2Ki 24:13), and carried off a large portion of the city's population. The third occurred in 586 B.C. when Zedekiah was king (2Ki 24:18-25:21; 2Chr 36:11-21; Jer 39:1-10; 52:1-30). "Zedekiah was the third son of Josiah to rule Judah, and he too ruled under Nebuchadnezzar's sovereignty (597-586 B.C.). The Babylonian monarch summoned Zedekiah to Babylon in 593 B.C. (51:59), but he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar by making a treaty with Pharaoh Hophra (589- 570 B.C.) under pressure from Judean nationalists (chs. 37—38). This resulted in the final siege of Jerusalem in 588 and its fall two years later in 586 B.C. (ch. 39). The Babylonians took Zedekiah captive to Riblah, in Syria, where they executed his sons and put out his eyes. He died later in Babylon. Since Jeremiah advocated surrender to the Babylonians, Nebuchadnezzar allowed him to choose where he wanted to live when Jerusalem fell, and the prophet elected to stay where he was. Shortly after he defeated Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar set up a pro-Babylonian Judean named Gedaliah as his governor of Judah (40:5-6)" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Jeremiah," 2020 ed., 9, planobiblechap-pdf/Jeremiah.pdf).

vv. 2, 3 *Jehoiachin, Zedekiah* Three of Josiah's sons and one of his grandsons ruled Judah after his death. His immediate successor was Jehoahaz (Shallum), his second son, who ruled only three months in 609 B.C. Jehoahaz's older brother, Jehoiakim succeeded him, thanks to Pharaoh Necho (2Ki 23:34; 2Chr 36:4). He ruled for 11 years (609-598 B.C.). Josiah's grandson, Jehoiachin (Jeconiah, Coniah) succeeded his father but only reigned three months (598-97 B.C.). Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle (2Chr 36:10), was Josiah's third son to rule Judah. He ruled from 597 to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (for a more detailed chronology see Constable,

8-11; on the curse on Jehoiachin (Coniah), Jeremiah 22:24-30, see J. Carl Laney, "Is There a Curse on Coniah?" transformedblog.westernseminary.edu/2013/11/05/is-there-a-curse-on-coniah/).

v. 3 *Elasah, Gemariah* I.e., Zedekiah's emissaries to Babylon. "Vassals were expected to communicate steadily with the overlord . . . This diplomatic mission may have been undertaken in response to the failed rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar [sic] in Babylon in 595/94 B.C., or to make peace after Zedekiah and the neighboring kings had met to plan revolt in the same year (chap. 27)" (Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 27, *Jeremiah* 26-52, 70).

v. 4 *I carried* "God is the subject of the phrase 'all those I carried into exile.' Of course, the previous verses noted that Nebuchadnezzar was the historical agent who took the people into exile, but in verse 4 the theological point is made that it is actually the work of God himself . . . The people are not to rebel against the authority of Babylon because, in effect, it is the authority of God over them for a prescribed time" (J. Andrew Dearman, *The NIV Application Commentary: Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 262). "God has sent these exiles to Babylon (4, reiterated in 7). At the very least, then, they should accept the situation" (Derek Kidner, *The Message of Jeremiah*, TBST, 100).

v. 6 *increase . . . do not decrease* "The seed of Abraham must continue according to the divine promise (cf. Gen 12:1-3)" (Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 198). "The deportees' identity will be perpetuated by their offspring and only through them will they receive 'a future and a hope'" (Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, 76).

vv. 10-15 *you* I.e., the ones to whom the letter was addressed, namely, the exiles living in Babylon. God had plans for *them*—"to prosper you and not harm you" he said, "and to give you hope and a future." He promised to bring *them* back to the land (vv. 10, 14). "These verses offer specific promises to the exiles rather than universal principles (Schmidt and Becker, *Zukunft*, 29)" (Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, 76). And while a large number of exiles did return to the land after the seventy years, many remained in Babylon. And following the three returns under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, the nation's sovereignty under a Davidic king has yet to be restored. "Since He did not return all of them to the land at the end of the Exile, premillennialists look for a fulfillment of these promises in the future. The returns from exile under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah were only partial fulfillments of these promises. Most of the exiles chose not to return (e.g., Mordecai and Esther). Perhaps others of them could not return (e.g., Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego)" (Constable, 251).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

God's people can adapt to living as aliens in a hostile world, knowing that he has plans to prosper them and to give them hope and a future.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The "Living Questions" are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

When my daughter was younger, she was struggling with some issue. Honestly, I can't remember the details, but I do remember my mom saying, "She doesn't like when bad things happen." Never have truer words been spoken. I don't know about you, but when I'm in the middle of great adversity I just want to curl up with my cats and be grumpy. None of us really like when bad things happen, but the other side of adversity promises personal growth and more fully develops our hope in Christ. Romans 5:3-4 tells us that suffering produces perseverance, then character and finally hope. Hope according to the world is not the same as hope in Christ. Hope according to the world is a whimsical fancy thrown around like pennies in a fountain. I hope I get a new fancy car and tour the world in 2021 (nope, not gonna happen). But hope in Christ is a certain and unshakable confidence in what is to come even when circumstances seem to be at their worst. In Jeremiah 29, God encourages His people to live life, plant gardens, marry and even have children amidst great personal trials. This is certainly contrary to what the world says, but hope beckons us toward Christ. No matter what I'm going through, I can put my hope in Christ because I know exactly what my future holds. Hope smiles and says one day heaven, so go ahead and plant that garden and live life to its fullest. After all, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Heb 6: 19).

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Jeremiah 29:1-14.

1. What instructions did God give the exiles (v 4-7)?
2. How long would the exiles be in Babylon?
3. What were the LORD's plans for His people?

What Do You Think?

Why was it important for the people continue living their lives even while they were in captivity?

What Do You Do?

Create an obstacle course in your living room. Ask family members if they hope to get across without any direction. Guide blindfolded family members along the path with your hand or with good instructions.

CORE COMPETENCY: Life Purpose

I believe God wants me to glorify Him in all I say and do.

MEMORY VERSE: Jeremiah 29:11

"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."

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- ☐ I completed my Bible Study
- ☐ I memorized this week's verse
- ☐ I brought my Bible to church
- ☐ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

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