

What Does Not Change: Hope-filled Presence

Ruth Padilla DeBorst

In this world, everything changes...
But my love does not change...
Nor do my memories nor does the pain
Of my land and of my people
And all that changed yesterday
Will have to change tomorrow
Just as I am changing
In this distant land.

—Julio Numhauser¹

1. Free translation of “*Todo cambia*,” original Spanish lyrics by Chilean musician Julio Numhauser (from the album *Todo cambia*, 1982, recorded while in exile in Switzerland), copyright Warner Chappell Music Argentina, Sadaic Latin Copyrights, Inc. This now legendary song was popularized by the late Mercedes Sosa.

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Change... Does everything change?

Change had been drastic for the people in exile. Torn from their cities, displaced from their lands, they had to make themselves understood in a strange language, tolerate a new diet, and adhere to new customs, values, and ways of life that were previously unknown to them. They had been forced to abandon all that was familiar and learn to fit in to a new context where they suffered oppression, discrimination, and abuse.

Surprising in this context, then, were the words of the prophet Jeremiah that reached the Israelites exiled in Babylon in the form of a letter:²

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

That is, somehow, even in this situation that appears to be a mere product of human power struggles, God is intervening. Circumstances, places, and economic conditions change. What does not change is God's presence with God's people.

And the letter continues:

Circumstances, places, and economic conditions change. What does not change is God's presence with God's people.

Build houses and settle down;

The hearers of the letter think their condition is temporary: they live expecting a new exodus and a return to their land and their people. The idea of putting down roots and becoming a community with the strangers around them is far from their minds.

Plant gardens and eat what they produce.

2. Jeremiah 29:4-7.