

## Journey through Jeremiah Part 31 Letter to the Exiles

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney, Th.D. – Wednesday, July 26, 2017

### † Jeremiah 29:1-32

1 Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon;

2 (After that Jeconiah the king, and the queen, and the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, and the carpenters, and the smiths, were departed from Jerusalem;)

3 By the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiyah, (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent unto Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon) saying,

We pick up in chapter 29 reading about a letter that God had Jeremiah write to the captives in Babylon. We need to understand that the words Jeremiah has penned down are the Words of the LORD, not the words of the prophet. Reading God's Word is one of the most important thing in the life of a child of God.

Imagine, if you will, being held as a prisoner in a foreign land where you didn't know anyone or even understand the language they were speaking. How wonderful it must have been to receive a letter written in your native language and from the mind of God. **Proverbs 30:5** Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.

4 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon;

An important thing to take notice of here, God tells them right up front that it is He who has caused them to be carried away. They are there because it is His will that they be there. He is the one that orchestrated the whole thing. He is the one that allowed Nebuchadnezzar to invade their land and take them as captives.

5 Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them;  
6 Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished.

Here the LORD commands them to carry on with their lives just as they would have in Jerusalem. Make Babylon your home because you will be there for a long time, 70-years in fact.

Have children, raise families, so the Jewish race will continue on. If they spend all their time agonizing over where they are and what they have lost and constantly trying to find a way to escape, they will be miserable and will just waste their time away.

7 And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.

He even tells them to maintain peace in Babylon. Try to get along with the Chaldeans. If they will just accept the fact that they are citizens there things will go much better for them and they will live in peace. He tells them to pray for them. That would be tough but that is the same message the Lord Jesus gives in the Gospels: **Luke 6:27-28** But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, **28** Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

8 For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; 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. 9 For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the LORD.

The LORD cautions them again not to be deceived by false prophets. They will continue to spread their lies and try to make them believe that their time in Babylon will be short but it is not true. They do not speak for God because they are only in it for themselves.

10 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.

Again, the LORD reminds them that they will be there for 70-years. They have already been told this before, we studied it in **Jeremiah 25:12**: And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations. So, despite what some false prophet may say. That is the time He has appointed and that is how long it will be. When the 70-years is over He will allow them to return and bless them again in their own land.

11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

He tells them that He and He alone knows His thought toward them. Isn't it wonderful to know that the LORD's thoughts are on us? That should give us great comfort. The false prophets have no idea of His thoughts. He says that His thoughts are peace and an expected end. The false prophet's thoughts are those of strife, evil, and uncertainty. They do not have the people's best interest at heart but He does.

12 Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. 13 And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. 14 And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.

What a comforting thing for them to read. We get such a wonderful description of the depth of love that the LORD has for His people. It's the same love that He has for us today. These are the same things that the LORD wants from us – our prayers and for us to seek Him. He says to seek him with all of our hearts. Not a half-hearted attempt but full hearted. The LORD is never pleased with our half-hearted ways. He wants us to be fully given over to Him and His will.

Here he promises to return the captives back to their beloved land of Judah.

15 Because ye have said, The LORD hath raised us up prophets in Babylon;

Now the subject changes to the false prophets. As hard as it is to imagine, even while being captives in Babylon the people are still believing the words of the false prophets. There are actually more of them rising up even in captivity and they are causing people to believe their lies. The LORD has a few things to say about this.

16 Know that thus saith the LORD of the king that sitteth upon the throne of David, and of all the people that dwelleth in this city, and of your brethren that are not gone forth with you into captivity;  
17 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will send upon them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil.  
18 And I will persecute them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, and an astonishment, and an hissing, and a reproach, among all the nations whither I have driven them:

The LORD is not going to have any mercy on these false prophets. We've already seen an example from the previous chapter when we studied about the false prophet Hananiah and how his life came to an end very quickly after spreading lies claiming to be from God. We will also read about Ahab and Zedekiah down in verse 21 who were false prophets, and Shemaiah down in verse 24, another false prophet that will be dealt with.

These false prophets, and apparently those that believe them, are going to face harsh punishment. The LORD is going to cause them to die by sword, famine, and pestilence and also make them a reproach. Their names and family name will forever be thought of as a reproach.

19 Because they have not hearkened to my words, saith the LORD, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but ye would not hear, saith the LORD.

He rebukes them for not listening to the real prophets that he had sent. They liked the message of the false prophets more so they listened to them and refused to listen to men like Jeremiah that had truly been sent.

20 Hear ye therefore the word of the LORD, all ye of the captivity, whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon:  
21 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, of Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and of Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, which prophesy a lie unto you in my name; Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall slay them before your eyes;

These two false prophets, Ahab and Zedekiah, have been spreading lies to the captives in Babylon. They are going to stir up the anger of King Nebuchadnezzar and he is going to kill them.

22 And of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captivity of Judah which are in Babylon, saying, The LORD make thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire; 23 Because they have committed villany in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives, and have spoken lying words in my name, which I have not commanded them; even I know, and am a witness, saith the LORD.

These were some really bad guys. Not only were they spreading lies through false prophecy but they were also committing all kinds of lewd sinful sexual acts. They remind me a lot of the modern day televangelists.

- Perhaps you remember back in the 80's when Televangelist, **Jim Bakker of PTL ministries**, was caught having sexual relationships with his Church secretary, Jessica Hahn, not to mention embezzling \$158 million dollars from people that gave to his ministry.
- Then in 1988 **Jimmy Swaggart** caught with a prostitute in a hotel room in New Orleans and then again in 1991 he was caught again.
- There was **Ted Haggard**, back in 2006, Pastor of the biggest Church in Colorado who was caught having sexual relationships with a male prostitute and buying illegal drugs.
- In 2010 **Bishop Eddie Long**, Pastor of an Atlanta megachurch, was caught trading cars and jewelry to teenagers in exchange for sexual acts.

And it just goes on and on. Listen, just like the false prophets in Israel, the LORD will deal with all false prophets.

Verse 23 ended the letter of Jeremiah and the next verses deal with another false prophet, Shemaiah.

24 Thus shalt thou also speak to Shemaiah the Nehelamite, saying,  
25 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, Because thou hast sent letters in thy name unto all the people that are at Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests, saying,  
26 The LORD hath made thee priest in the stead of Jehoiada the priest, that ye should be officers in the house of the LORD, for every man that is mad, and maketh himself a prophet, that thou shouldest put him in prison, and in the stocks.  
27 Now therefore why hast thou not reproved Jeremiah of Anathoth, which maketh himself a prophet to you?  
28 For therefore he sent unto us in Babylon, saying, This captivity is long: build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them.  
29 And Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the ears of Jeremiah the prophet.

This Shemaiah, whom we really don't know much about other than he is a Nehelamite, has written letters to Zephaniah the high priest and the other priests, demanding that they place Jeremiah in prison. He tells them he should be considered a mad man because he had prophesied a long captivity for the inhabitants of Judah. He says that he needed to be locked up in stocks.

Zephaniah read this letter in front of Jeremiah.

30 Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying, 31 Send to all them of the captivity, saying, Thus saith the LORD concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite; Because that Shemaiah hath prophesied unto you, and I sent him not, and he caused you to trust in a lie: 32 Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite, and his seed: he shall not have a man to dwell among this people; neither shall he behold the good that I will do for my people, saith the LORD; because he hath taught rebellion against the LORD.

Once again the LORD doles out a harsh punishment on Shemaiah. He is punishing him and his children by cutting off his family name not allowing any more men to be born in his family.

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† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version of the Bible