

## JEREMIAH'S LETTERS TO THE JEWS IN CAPTIVITY

### **TEXT: JEREMIAH 29:1-32**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

1. Jeremiah chapter 29 is a record of letters written by the prophet Jeremiah, and sent to the Jews who were in exile in Babylon (29:1-3).
2. Among the exiles was Jeconiah, the king who had succeeded his father Jehoiakim (29:2). Jeconiah had only reigned for three months, and was then taken by the Babylonians into captivity. Jeconiah was succeeded by Zedekiah, the last king of Judah.
3. Jeremiah's letters were delivered by two trustworthy friends: Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah (29:3).
4. Gemariah was son of Hilkiah, the high priest who found the book of the law in the temple during the reign of King Josiah (II Kings 22:8).
5. The messengers who carried Jeremiah's letters were sent as ambassadors from King Zedekiah to King Nebuchadnezzar.
6. When Jeremiah knew of their trip, he gave Elasah and Gemariah these letter, containing important messages from the LORD to those that were carried away as captives into Babylon (Jer. 29:4; cf. 29:7).

#### **I. THE FIRST MESSAGE**

1. Jeremiah not only encouraged those living in Jerusalem, he also encouraged those that were taken away into captivity.
2. First of all, they were to understand that it was the LORD that caused them to be carried away from Jerusalem into Babylon (29:4).
3. Things so a lot easier for us when we see God's hand in it. The other night I heard a man say. "All things are not good, but we know all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).
4. R.A. Torrey called Romans 8:28 "a soft pillow for a tired heart."
5. H.A. Ironside said, "The first thing He brings before them is that it was no chance misfortune that had happened unto them. It was Himself who had caused them to be carried away. If they really believed this, how it would affect all their ways. They would see that it was in vain to resist His holy discipline; but it would also, surely, be manifest to them that He was truly concerned about them; otherwise He might have left them to pursue unhindered their self chosen course. Ah, He loved them too well for that, as He loves 'His own which are in the world' now far too much to permit them to go on long in a path contrary to His mind without causing them to feel the rod of

- chastening. Blessed it is to remember that He deals with us not as enemies, but as sons; for 'what son is he whom his father chasteneth not?'" (*Jeremiah and Lamentations*).
6. Jeremiah did not want the exiles to think they would soon be coming home. That is what the false prophets were saying (29:7-9, 21, 31).
  7. The people in exile said, "The LORD hath raised us up prophets in Babylon" (29:15), but Jeremiah wanted them to know that these prophets were false prophets (29:16-19).
  8. Jeremiah did not want the exiles to think they would soon be coming home, so he told them to build houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; take wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for their sons, and give their daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that they may be increased there, and not diminished (29:5, 6).
  9. In other words, they were going to be there for a long time -- seventy years (29:10; cf. 25:11, 12).
  10. The exiles were to seek the peace of their city, and were to pray unto the LORD for it (29:7). This principle is taught throughout Scripture.
  11. Ezra 6:10 says, "Pray for the life of the king, and of his sons."
  12. Romans 13:1 says, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."
  13. First Timothy 2:1-3 says, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour."
  14. First Peter 2:13 and 14 says, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well."
  15. Titus 3:1 and 2 says, "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men."
  16. God's thoughts were "thoughts of peace, and not of evil" (29:11). After their chastening they would call upon the LORD and He would restore them (29:12-14).

17. This is the LORD'S message of encouragement to the exiles in Babylon. We find God's message of encouragement to us all throughout Scripture.
18. Psalm 139:17 says, "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!"
19. First Peter 5:7 says, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."

## **II. A MESSAGE OF WARNING (29:17-23)**

1. Rebels are referred to in verse 17 as "like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil."
2. Because they would not obey the LORD, they would face His judgment (29:17-19).
3. Jeremiah's message was a message of encouragement to those in captivity who would submit to the will of God, but it was also a warning to those who would not submit to the LORD (29:20-23).
4. There are many warnings about false prophets throughout the book of Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 29:21, two of these false prophets are mentioned by name: Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah. Both were killed by King Nebuchadnezzar.
5. A third false prophet, Shemaiah the Nehelamite, is referred to in verses 24-32. He was also judged by God.
6. Jeremiah 28 concludes with the death of the false prophet Hananiah.
7. Some people do not like it when preachers identify false prophets, but in the Bible false prophets are often identified by name.
8. In I Timothy 1:19 and 20, the apostle Paul says, "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme."
9. In II Timothy 2:16-18, Paul says, "But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some."
10. In II Timothy 4:14, Paul says, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works."
11. If Jeremiah and Paul and others in the Bible warned about false teachers, and identified them by name, we should do the same.
12. We should warn people about Benny Hinn and Rick Warren and Joel Osteen and some of these other false teachers.

13. The crime of Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah was prophesying a lie in the name of the LORD (29:21; cf. 29:8, 9; 14:14, 15).
14. The Babylonians burned them alive in the fire (29:22), a popular form of execution in Babylon. You will recall that King Nebuchadnezzar had Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego cast into a burning fiery furnace.
15. Not only had these men, Ahab and Zedekiah, prophesied lies in the name of the LORD, but "they committed villany in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives" (29:23).
16. It is often the case that false prophets are also wicked adulterers.

### **III. A MESSAGE FOR SHEMAIAH (29:24-32)**

1. It is not altogether clear, but apparently this message to the false prophet Shemaiah was sent separately and at a later date.
2. The messengers carried these letters from Shemaiah to "all the people that are at Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests" (29:25).
3. The false prophet Shemaiah is referred to in verses 24, 31, and 32 as "Shemaiah the Nehelamite."
4. This letter was sent in response to letters sent by Shemaiah that contradicted Jeremiah's earlier letter (29:1). Shemaiah's letter encouraged the people to "reprove" Jeremiah (29:26, 27).
5. Shemaiah referred to Jeremiah in a scornful way, calling him a madman, and suggesting in verse 26 is that Zephaniah, the chief temple officer, should put Jeremiah "in prison, and in the stocks."
6. According to Shemaiah, Jeremiah had "made himself a prophet" (29:26). H.A. Ironside said, "Men, unsent themselves by God, are ever ready to charge the true servants of the Lord with being self appointed men - so deceiving are the ways of Satan."
7. In his letter, Shemaiah refers specifically to Jeremiah's instructions in verse 28 (cf. verse 5).
8. Verse 29 tells us that "Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the ears of Jeremiah the prophet." Jeremiah responded by telling the exiles that Shemaiah the Nehelamite would surely be punished for his rebellion (29:30-32).
9. God would cut off his "seed," and "he shall not have a man to dwell among this people; neither shall he behold the good that I will do for my people" (29:32).

10. Shemaiah would die childless in Babylon. He would never be able to return to his native land. When the exiles returned to Jerusalem, Shemaiah would not live to see it. He would not behold the good that the LORD would do for His people, because he had taught rebellion against the LORD (29:32).

### **CONCLUSION:**

1. On September 10, 1876, Spurgeon preached a message entitled, "A Second Word to Seekers," and his text was Jeremiah 29:13. "And you shall seek me, and find me, when you shall search for me with all your heart."
2. Spurgeon said, "The quality required in the seeker is whole-heartedness — he must search for the Lord with all his heart...O Man, if you were in a burning house you would be eager to get out of it! If there seemed a probability that you would sink in a river, you would struggle desperately to get to shore! How is it, then, that you are so little moved by the peril of your soul? Man is awakened when his life is once known to be in peril—how much more earnest ought he to be when eternal life or eternal death are the solemn alternatives!"