

A Letter to the Remnant (Jeremiah 29:1–23)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (7/26/2020)

I. The Setting

1. Chapter 25 presents the time involved in the captivity—*70 years*—to address the failure of the Jews to observe the sabbath for the land every seven years. The time of this revelation was the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim and the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (605 b. c.).
 - a. Jeremiah had been faithfully preaching the Word of Yahweh for 23 years, warning the priests, politicians, and people to hear the Lord’s warning, repent, and obey.
 - b. The people had no desire to pay attention or to take the warning seriously, even when the awful nature of the judgment was described to them.
 - c. The people of Judah along with the nations (Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Sidon, etc.) surrounding them would be “*devoted to destruction*” and serve Babylon. After 70 years were fulfilled, the Lord would restore Judah, turning against the Chaldeans and punishing them for their sins against the Lord. All would drink the cup of the Lord’s wrath.
2. Chapter 26 took place four years earlier in the *first* year of Jehoiakim’s reign. The message God gave to the prophet at that time was disastrous if they did not listen (26:4–6).

The *priests* persuaded the people to oppose Jeremiah, and they threatened him with death. The *officials* persuaded the people that harming Jeremiah was wrong (v. 16). Jeremiah was spared.

3. Chapter 27 introduces the yoke and its message.
 - a. This chapter takes place in 597 b. c., the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah the son of Josiah. The Creator, who gave to the nations lands and authority, was about to put them under judgment. To illustrate the Lord’s determination, Jeremiah was ordered to wear a *yoke* as a constant reminder.
 - b. It is here that the real problem surfaces. Jeremiah warned the king not to listen to the lying prophets (27:14).
4. Chapter 28 develops this problem of prophet versus prophets.
 - a. Hananiah, a false prophet from Gibeon, spoke to Jeremiah in the temple in the presence of the priests and people (vv. 2, 3).
 - b. Hananiah, then, took the yoke from Jeremiah’s neck and broke it, repeating his popular message that the Lord would break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar within two years (*two* being the number of unity). But the Lord had another word for the prophet (vv. 13, 14). The lying Hananiah died that same year (v. 17).

II. Prophet Versus Prophets

1. The events of Chapter 29 take place in the same year, 597 b. c., after Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) was taken to Babylon. This was the second deportation; the first was 605 b. c. Jeremiah was instructed to send a letter to the survivors exiled to Babylon with directives for their 70-year ordeal.
 - a. The great problem in Jeremiah’s day, as we noted earlier, was that of prophet versus prophets. Jeremiah stood alone with a message of judgment and doom to a people who had no ears for the

truth and no heart to know the Lord. Stubborn in their disobedience, covenant breaking, and tending to idolatry, they would not be corrected. Thus, in the letter to the exiles, the Lord pressed upon them not to listen to the false prophets among them(vv. 8, 9).

- b. What is amazing is the brazen audacity of those who purport to speak for God, knowing they were neither called by Him nor had any word from Him. Did they not realize that they would one day stand before Him to answer for their lies and false profession? The Lord assured them: "*I am the One who knows, and I am witness, declares the Lord*" (v. 23).
- 2. The exiles, however, were confident they had God's prophets among them.
 - a. Two things about the prophets were problems: (1) The people would not listen to the true prophets God sent them. (2) The prophets they approved, Ahab and Zedekiah, lied to them.
 - b. The Lord had persistently sent true prophets to them whom they would not regard. Now in their suffering, why would they want to put any confidence in the false prophets among them? Their exile should have alerted them to the false hope given by the liars. Their spiritual blindness and inattention to God's words was the real problem.
 - c. People want to tell God what they want and what He should do for them rather than submit to His will. Satan is ready and willing to supply all the prophets needed to preach a false message that thrills the heart and tickles the ears (2 Tim. 4:2–4).

III. Divine Advice to Exiles

- 1. Instead of listening to the lies of the false prophets, assuring them that their sad plight was only temporary, God assured them that it was not. The king and those remaining in Judah were soon to see judgment by sword, famine, and pestilence (v. 18).
 - a. The exiles must settle in for the long haul—70 years, the time traditionally reckoned for the human lifespan (Psa. 90:10).
 - b. Seventy is also the number of universality and restoration. The seventy weeks were decreed (Daniel 9:25) from the time of the return and restoration until the coming of Jesus.
- 2. The instructions God gave to the exiles consisted of three things:
 - a. The Lord advised the people to live a godly life in the place where He put them. Babylon would be their home now for a lifetime.
 - b. They were to seek the welfare of the place where they were now living. In other words, their welfare depended on the peace and prosperity of their Babylonian captors.
 - c. They were to trust God and wait patiently for the promises of God to be fulfilled to the generations that followed them (vv. 10–13).

God's Word to His Church

No doubt, the Apostle Peter had Jeremiah 29 in mind when he wrote his letter to the "elect exiles of the dispersion" (1 Pet. 1:1). Like the remnant in Babylon, the followers of Jesus are living in exile. Like Israel, the church has glorious promises to cherish, wait for, and rejoice in with hope (1 Pet. 1:3–7). Let us not be as the Jews who trusted in false prophets (1 Pet. 1:13–19).