

Jeremiah Chapters 29-30

Bible Study Notes - Chapter 29

A Letter to the Exiles – Verses 1-23

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.*

29:4-7 Jeremiah wrote to the captives in Babylon (29:4-23) instructing them to move ahead with their lives and to pray for the pagan nation that enslaved them. Life cannot grind to a halt during troubled times. In an unpleasant or distressing situation, we must adjust and keep moving. You may find it difficult to pray for those in authority if they are evil, but that is when your prayers are most needed (1 Timothy 2:1-2). When you enter times of trouble or sudden change, pray diligently and move ahead, doing whatever you can rather than giving up because of fear and uncertainty.

29:10 Scholars differ on the exact dates of this 70-year period in Babylon. Some say it refers to the years 605-538 B.C., from the first deportation to Babylon to the arrival of the first exiles back in Jerusalem after Cyrus's freedom decree. Others point to the years 586-515 B.C., from the last deportation to Babylon and the destruction of the temple until its rebuilding. A third possibility is that 70 years is an approximate number meaning a lifetime. All agree that God sent his people to Babylon for a long time, not the short captivity predicted by the false prophets.

29:11 We're all encouraged by a leader who stirs us to move ahead, someone who believes we can do the task he has given and who will be with us all the way. God is that kind of leader. He knows the future, and his plans for us are good and full of hope. As long as God, who knows the future, provides our agenda and goes with us as we fulfill his mission, we can have boundless hope. This does

not mean that we will be spared pain, suffering, or hardship, but that God will see us through to a glorious conclusion.

29:12 God did not forget his people, even though they were captives in Babylon. He planned to give them a new beginning with a new purpose—to turn them into new people. In times of deep trouble, it may appear as though God has forgotten you. But God may be preparing you, as he did the people of Judah, for a new beginning with him at the center.

29:13 According to God's wise plan, his people were to have hope and a future; consequently, they could call upon him in confidence. Although the exiles were in a difficult place and time, they did not need to despair because they had God's presence, the privilege of prayer, and God's grace. God can be sought and found when we seek him wholeheartedly. Neither strange lands, sorrows, frustration, nor physical problems can break our communion with God.

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. "¹⁵ You may say, "The LORD has raised up prophets for us in Babylon," ¹⁶ but this is what the LORD says about the king who sits on David's throne and all the people who remain in this city, your fellow citizens who did not go with you into exile—¹⁷ yes, this is what the LORD Almighty says: "I will send the sword, famine and plague against them and I will make them like figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten. ¹⁸ I will pursue them with the sword, famine and plague and will make them abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth, a curse^{and an object of horror,} of scorn and reproach, among all the nations where I drive them. ¹⁹ For they have not listened to my words," declares the LORD, "words that I sent to them again and again by my servants the prophets. And you exiles have not listened either," declares the LORD. ²⁰ Therefore, hear the word of the LORD, all you exiles whom I have sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon. ²¹ This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says about Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying lies to you in my name: "I will deliver them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will put them to death before your very eyes. ²² Because of them, all the exiles from Judah who are in Babylon will use this curse: 'May the LORD treat you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon burned in the fire.' ²³ For they have done outrageous things in Israel; they have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives, and in my name they have uttered lies—which I did not authorize. I know it and am a witness to it," declares the LORD.

29:20 Why would Nebuchadnezzar decide to execute these two false prophets? In contrast to Jeremiah's message from God that the people should settle in Babylon and wait faithfully for 70 years to pass, the false prophets were inciting false hopes for a quick return to Jerusalem. This would have sounded like rebellion to the Babylonian king, who would have had little hesitation over killing uncooperative refugees.

29:21 These false prophets, Ahab and Zedekiah, should not be confused with the kings who had the same names. Their family connections clearly identify them.

Message to Shemaiah – Verses 24-32

²⁴ Tell Shemaiah the Nehelamite, ²⁵ "This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: You sent letters in your own name to all the people in Jerusalem, to the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah, and to all the other priests. You said to Zephaniah, ²⁶ 'The LORD has appointed you priest in place of Jehoiada to be in charge of the house of the LORD; you should put any maniac who acts like a prophet into the stocks and neck-irons. ²⁷ So why have you not reprimanded Jeremiah from Anathoth, who poses as a prophet among you?' ²⁸ He has sent this message to us in Babylon: It will be a long time. Therefore build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.'" ²⁹ Zephaniah the priest, however, read the letter to Jeremiah the prophet. ³⁰ Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ³¹ "Send this message to all the exiles: 'This is what the LORD says about Shemaiah the Nehelamite: Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, even though I did not send him, and has persuaded you to trust in lies, ³² this is what the LORD says: I will surely punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his descendants. He will have no one left among this people, nor will he see the good things I will do for my people, declares the LORD, because he has preached rebellion against me.'"

29:24-28 These verses describe the reaction of Shemaiah, a false prophet exiled in 597 B.C. who had protested about Jeremiah's letter. To discredit Jeremiah, Shemaiah accused him of false prophecy. Although Jeremiah's message was true and his words were from God, the people hated him because he told them to make the most of the Exile. But Jeremiah's truth from God offered temporary correction and long-range benefit, while the false teachers' lies offered only temporary comfort and long-range punishment.

Bible Study Notes - Chapter 30

Restoration of Israel

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you. ³ The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity^{and} restore them to the land I gave their ancestors to possess,' says the LORD." ⁴ These are the words the LORD spoke concerning Israel and Judah: ⁵ "This is what the LORD says: "Cries of fear are heard terror, not peace. ⁶ Ask and see: Can a man bear children? Then why do I see every strong man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labor, every face turned deathly pale? ⁷ How awful that day will be! No other will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it. ⁸ "In that day," declares the LORD Almighty, 'I will break the yoke off their necks and will tear off their bonds; no longer will foreigners enslave them. ⁹ Instead, they will serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them. ¹⁰ "So do not be afraid, Jacob my servant; do not be dismayed, Israel,' declares the LORD. 'I will surely save you out of a distant place, your descendants from the land of their exile. Jacob will again have peace and security, and no one will make him afraid. ¹¹ I am with you and will save you,' declares the LORD. 'Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only in due measure; I will not let you go entirely unpunished.' ¹² "This is what the LORD says: "Your wound is incurable, your injury beyond healing. ¹³ There is no one to plead your cause, no remedy for your sore, no healing for

you. ¹⁴ All your allies have forgotten you; they care nothing for you. I have struck you as an enemy would and punished you as would the cruel, because your guilt is so great and your sins so many. ¹⁵ Why do you cry out over your wound, your pain that has no cure? Because of your great guilt and many sins I have done these things to you. ¹⁶ "But all who devour you will be devoured; all your enemies will go into exile. Those who plunder you will be plundered; all who make spoil of you I will despoil. ¹⁷ But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,' declares the LORD, 'because you are called an outcast, Zion for whom no one cares.' ¹⁸ "This is what the LORD says: "I will restore the fortunes of Jacob's tents and have compassion on his dwellings; the city will be rebuilt on her ruins, and the palace will stand in its proper place. ¹⁹ From them will come songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing. I will add to their numbers, and they will not be decreased; I will bring them honor, and they will not be disdained. ²⁰ Their children will be as in days of old, and their community will be established before me;

I will punish all who oppress them. ²¹ Their leader will be one of their own; their ruler will arise from among them. I will bring him near and he will come close to me—for who is he who will devote himself to be close to me?' declares the LORD. ²² "So you will be my people, and I will be your God.'"²³ See, the storm of the LORD will burst out in wrath, a driving wind swirling down on the heads of the wicked. ²⁴ The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart. In days to come you will understand this.

30:1-24 Chapters 30 and 31 show that Jeremiah spoke of hope and consolation as well as trouble and gloom. The people would one day be restored to their land, and God would make a new covenant with them to replace the one they broke. Where once they sinned and disobeyed, eventually they would repent and obey.

30:8-9 Like Isaiah, Jeremiah associated events of the near future and those of the distant future. Reading these prophecies is like looking at several mountain peaks in a range. From a distance they look as though they are next to each other, when actually they are miles apart. Jeremiah presents near and distant events as if they will all happen soon. He sees the Exile, but he sees also the future day when Christ will reign forever. The reference to David is not to King David, but to his famous descendant, the Messiah (Luke 1:69).

30:12-13, 17 The medical language here conveys the idea that sin is terminal. Sinful people cannot be cured by being good or being religious. Beware of putting your confidence in useless cures while your sin spreads and causes you pain. God alone can cure the disease of sin, but you must be willing to let him do it.

30:15 Judah protested its punishment, even though the sin that caused the pain was scandalous. But punishment is an opportunity for growth because it makes us aware of sin's consequences. The people should have asked how they could profit from their mistakes. Remember this the next time you are corrected.

30:18 This prophecy that Jerusalem would be rebuilt was not completely fulfilled by the work of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Zerubbabel. The city was indeed rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity, but the

final restoration will occur when all believers are gathered in Christ's kingdom. This restoration will include buildings (30:18), people (30:19), and rulers (30:21).

30:21 This verse refers to the restoration after the Babylonian captivity, as well as to the final restoration under Christ.