

Far From Home (Jeremiah 29:1-14)

Now these are the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the rest of the elders of the exile, the priests, the prophets and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. {2} (This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the court officials, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem.) {3} The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, saying, {4} "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, {5} 'Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce. {6} Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. {7} Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.' {8} For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Do not let your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream. {9} For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them,' declares the LORD. {10} For thus says the LORD, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. {11} For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. {12} Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. {13} You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. {14} 'I will be found by you,' declares the LORD, 'and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,' declares the LORD, 'and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.'"

Because they had rebelled against the righteous laws given to them at Mount Sinai, the people of Judah had fallen from grace. By turning his back on the law, Judah had turned his back upon God. Furthermore, he rejected every attempt that God made through men like Jeremiah and Ezekiel to turn him back to the old paths. Prior to this, during the time of Moses, just prior to when the nation entered the land of promise, God told the nation that if they kept the law He would set them "high above all the nations of the earth" and that numerous blessings would "overtake" them (Deut. 28:1-2). Among these blessing there was the blessing of God's protection from other nations. God said that if the nation kept His commandments and walked in His ways "all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they will be afraid of you" (vss. 9-10). However, if the nation did not "obey the Lord ...to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes..." (Deut. 28:15) God promised that instead of blessings He would send curses; He would take away their protection and allow other nations to plunder their goods, as well as their children.

(Deu 28:25) The LORD shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

(Deu 28:32-34) Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and yearn for them continually; but there will be nothing you can do. {33} A people whom you do not know shall eat up the produce of your ground and all your labors, and you will never be anything but oppressed and crushed continually. {34} You shall be driven mad by the sight of what you see.

(Deu 28:49-53) The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, {50} a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young. {51} Moreover, it shall eat the offspring of your herd and the produce of your ground until you are destroyed, who also leaves you no grain, new wine, or oil, nor the increase of your herd or the young of your flock until they have caused you to perish. {52} It

shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout your land, and it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout your land which the LORD your God has given you. {53} Then you shall eat the offspring of your own body, the flesh of your sons and of your daughters whom the LORD your God has given you, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you.

It was predicted in the time of Moses that all this would happen to the nation if they did not keep the Law. Jeremiah's task was to remind the people of these curses. But through Jeremiah God also revealed that He would use Babylon as the instrument of His wrath – to bring the nation into captivity.

(Jer 25:8-11) Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, "Because you have not obeyed My words, {9} behold, I will send and take all the families of the north," declares the LORD, "and I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. {10} Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. {11} This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years."

"Because you have not obeyed My words," said the Lord, I will utterly you. Your "land will be a desolation and a horror" as you "serve the king of Babylon seventy years." But the people did not believe the prophet. But they did believe those prophets who contradicted Jeremiah's prophecies, who told the people that the nation would not be destroyed false prophets who told them that God would not utterly destroy them even though they refused to turn back to the law. While Jeremiah, on the one hand, predicted captivity in Babylon these false prophets were saying, "You will not serve the king of Babylon" (Jer 27:9).

But history shows that it was Jeremiah who was the true prophet. For his words were fulfilled to the last detail. The desolation began with the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 606 B.C. and the first deportation of the best of the land into slavery on foreign soil. Further deportations followed and finally Jerusalem and her temple were destroyed, just as Jeremiah (and many of the other prophets before him) predicted. Furthermore, seventy years after Judah began to serve the king of Babylon, in 536 B.C., Babylon fell to the Medio-Persian Empire. This too, was predicted by Jeremiah.

(Jer 25:12) Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, declares the LORD, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation.

Those who believe in the God of the Bible are not surprised to find such prophetic accuracy in the pages of the Scripture. It is exciting for us to investigate such fulfillments as it deepens our respect for our God's power and wisdom and for the written word of God. But this is not what I want to speak about in this lesson.

What I would like to address is that letter that Jeremiah wrote to those who were taken captive in 606 B.C.. These were a sad lot who had lost everything – their homes, their freedom and in many cases they were separated from their families. They were brought to live in a strange land with strange customs and language. Jeremiah's instructions to these exiles seem pertinent to God's people today since we too are exiles in a manner of speaking.

• GOD'S ADVICE TO THE EXILE

(Jer 29:1) Now these are the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the rest of the elders of the exile, the priests, the prophets and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Men and woman of faith have never been at home in this world; they have always looked at this world as only a temporary home. In that roll call of faith, for example, in Heb 11 the writer invites us to approach life with the same attitude as Abraham who...

(Heb 11:13-16) ...died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. {14} For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. {15} And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. {16} But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

This world is temporary; the things that we see will not last; it is all being destroyed with the passing of time. As it is written, the heavens and the earth "will perish ...and they will become old like a garment" (Heb 1:10-11). And that which remains with the passing of time will be destroyed on that final day with fire: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up" (2 Pet 3:10). Therefore, our emphasis in life must not be upon these temporary things, but on things eternal – on "the new heavens and new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet 3:13). And with our sights on these eternal things what sort of life should we living? Listen to Peter...

(1 Pet 1:17) And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth.

(1 Pet 2:11-12) Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. {12} Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

(2 Pet 3:13-14) But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. {14} Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless.

• ACCEPTING LIFE AS IT COMES

(Jer 29:4-7) "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, {5} 'Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce. {6} Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. {7} Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.'"

Life goes on. Sometimes we are called upon to face tremendous difficulties because we have decided to follow Jesus. Because of this some have decided that the only way they can live a faithful Christian life is to live in a monastery or in some geographically isolated place. But this is not God's answer to this problem.

Jeremiah told the exiles of his day to live as normal lives as possible. He also told them to pray for the welfare of the cities of their enemies – the cities where they had been sent into exile. God said: "in its welfare you will have welfare." A similar admonition has been given to us

Christians. First of all Jesus us tell us to love and pray for our enemies — those who persecute us (Matt 5:44). And through Paul we are told to seek the welfare of the government that we happen to live under.

(1 Tim 2:1-4) First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, {2} for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. {3} This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, {4} who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

While we live in exile we too must pray for those who are a part of this world — who are at home on earth. And we too must live as normally as we can: marry, set up house, get a job, raise a family, etc. etc. But this does not mean that we are to embrace the ungodly customs of those about us. Peter had something to say about this in his first epistle

(1 Pet 4:1-3) Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, {2} so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. {3} For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.

Living live as normally as we can does not mean that we become like those around us in every way. There are things that Christians ought not to do and that because we do not do them the people that we live among — those who are at home in the world, will thing us strange (1 Pet 4:4)!

Brothers and sister, the Holy Spirit tells us to our lives as examples to others: “Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet 2:12).

• PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

(Jer 29:10) For thus says the LORD, “When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.”

God had the timing all worked out for those who were in exile in Babylon. I am sure that seventy years seemed like a long time, but seventy years is what had been decreed. There would be no short cuts. In a like manner God also knows how long our exile here will last. Though “mockers will come with their mocking ...saying ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation” (2 Pet 3:4) we know “that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years line one day” (2 Pet 3:8). Be patient, dear brethren, the Lord Jesus will come in God’s own time.

• TRUST GOD IN EVERYTHING

(Jer 29:11-14) “For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. {12} Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. {13} You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. {14} I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,” declares the LORD, “and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.”

Through all of life's hardships there is one absolutely secure place wherein we can place our hope and future. God assured the exiles of Jeremiah's day that He loved them. Even in their bleakest hour God was there and influencing events toward their proper conclusion. He is still there today. His plans for our future fill us with hope. As it is written: “and though you have not

seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, {9} obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet 1:8-9).

- **BEWARE OF FALSE HOPES**

(Jer 29:8-9) For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Do not let your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream. {9} For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them," declares the LORD."

It was something people really wanted to believe. The false prophets were telling them that they would be going home soon; it would not take seventy years. They were insisting that captivity would soon be over and there were probably many ears happy to hear the news. But it wasn't true!

Today we have the modern counterparts of these false prophets. Some promise to make you well if you send them money. Some say they know when Jesus will come when the Bible says no one knows. Some say God does not exist and that there will never be a judgment and so you can live however you want to without regret. Some say human beings are simply uppity apes. Some say grab the gusto. Some say if you do not get your life right this time, you will come back again reincarnated as another person. Do not allow yourself to be made to trust in a lie. The truth of God is better than the lies of men.

- **Conclusion and Invitation**