

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

JER. 29:1 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 Hilkiah, (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent unto Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon) saying,

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;

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.

7 And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be car-

ried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.

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.

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.

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.

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.

NOTES

God's Hope for Exiles

Lesson Text: Jeremiah 29:1-14

Related Scriptures: 2 Kings 24:8-20; 1 Timothy 2:1-4;
1 Peter 2:11-17; Jeremiah 28:1-17; Daniel 9:1-19

TIME: probably 597 B.C.

PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

Lesson Exposition

THE SETTING—Jer. 29:1-3

The first three verses provide the historical context of the passage. Writing from Judah, Jeremiah sent this letter to those who were in Babylon after the second wave of exiles was taken. Jeremiah saw the second and the third wave of exile (cf. Jer. 24; 39).

SEEK THE WELFARE OF THE CITY—Jer. 29:4-7

In verse 4, Jeremiah asserted that God was in control. He was the one who had sent Judah away into exile. To be sure, Nebuchadnezzar was the human agent of God's plan. But God claimed full responsibility for the exile.

Shemaiah promised that the exile would last only a short time. But Jeremiah urged them to build houses and plant gardens—activities that would not make sense if they were to return to Judah shortly. He urged them to marry, have children, and see their children married so that their children could have children. In other words, they were to settle in Babylon. The exile would not be ending soon.

The Lord called them to multiply while in Babylon. Further, they were

not merely to seek their own good and the future good of the Jewish nation but also to bless Babylon (vs. 7).

Likewise, we are called to seek the good of our communities today. We never condone evil acts of others, but we must pray for them. We pray for our leaders, whether we like them or not (1 Tim. 2:1-4). Further, Jesus calls us to love our enemies and pray for them (Matt. 5:44).

DO NOT BE DECEIVED—Jer. 29:8-9

The Lord told the people not to let the false prophets and diviners deceive them. The first group consisted of people like Hananiah (a false prophet the Lord killed in chapter 28) and Shemaiah, a false prophet in chapter 29 who claimed to speak for the Lord. The second group, the "diviners," may have consisted of fortune tellers, who dabbled in pagan religious practices that God had forbidden. Both the prophets falsely claiming to speak for the Lord and the diviners who practiced fortune-telling were to be ignored; they were speaking lies, not God's Word.

While God certainly has used dreams to communicate with His people in the

past (Gen. 28:10-17; Matt. 1:20-24) and may do so today if He wishes, one should be cautious of putting too much stock in dreams. Even when God's servants interpreted dreams, they emphasized that it was not through their own wisdom or skill but through God's intervention (Gen. 41:15-16; Dan. 2:26-28).

Jesus said that we would recognize false teachers by their fruit (Matt. 7:15-20). If someone speaks for God, his or her actions will reflect it. In contrast, false teachers do not have the fruit of the Spirit. Rather, they are captives of sin (2 Pet. 2:1-4, 12-22). We should not listen to everyone who claims to speak for the Lord. Rather, we should "test the spirits" (cf. 1 John 4:1-3).

THE LORD WILL RESTORE— Jer. 29:10-14

The Lord promised that after seventy years, He would restore the people to their land. That would not have felt encouraging for many of them, who would not live long enough to return to the land. Moses said that our lifespan is seventy or eighty years (Ps. 90:10), so this judgment on Judah was a lifespan. This was not an arbitrary amount of time but a judgment long enough so that the land of Israel would be able to observe the Sabbaths that had been ignored for hundreds of years (Lev. 26:33-35; 2 Chr. 36:20-21).

Although some of those who were young when they went into exile made it back to the Promised Land (cf. Ezra 3:12), most did not. Even though many of those going into exile would not see the return, the Lord did not forget His people. He promised that He would bring them back, and in time, He did.

The Lord kept His promise to the people of Judah, and He later returned them from exile. Further, exile seems to have largely cured His people of their temptation to polytheism. Throughout the history of Israel and Judah, God's people had frequently chased after false gods. But when the Lord sent them to Babylon,

the capital of a polytheistic nation, He cured them of this desire. Afterward, the nation was stoutly monotheistic. They sought Him more diligently after exile than they had beforehand.

For the people who were in exile, the Lord's blessing seemed far off. Many of them died in Babylon and did not see the promises fulfilled. God's timing is often different from ours, and His methods are usually not what we would choose.

God's blessings did not merely take care of His people's physical needs, though they did that when He returned them to the land. The plans God had for them included the coming King, the seed of David and the seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head (cf. 2 Sam. 7:16; Gen. 3:15).

—Tom Greene

QUESTIONS

1. When, where, and to whom did Jeremiah write this?
2. Who was responsible for the exile?
3. What did the false prophet Shemaiah claim? How did Jeremiah respond?
4. Who did the Lord warn the people not to be deceived by?
5. How should we normally respond to people claiming to have dreams from the Lord?
6. How can we recognize false teachers today?
7. Why would the Lord's promise have been *discouraging* for many Israelites?
8. Why was the exile seventy years long?
9. What was one positive result of the exile for God's people?
10. In addition to physical blessings, what did God's plans for His people include?

—Tom Greene

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Even when the Lord disciplines His people, He does not give up on them (Jer. 29:1-3).
2. The Lord is in control, even in difficult circumstances (vs. 4).
3. Obedience to God does not mean a disinterest in practical matters (vss. 5-6).
4. We should seek the welfare of the place God has put us (vs. 7).
5. Watch out for false prophets who speak soothing lies (vss. 8-9).
6. The Lord's timing is often different from ours (vs. 10).
7. The Lord has plans of blessing for His people (vs. 11).
8. If we seek the Lord with all our heart, we will find Him (vss. 12-14).

—Tom Greene

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. In what ways can we draw parallels between the Jews in exile and Christians today? In what ways can we not draw parallels?
2. How would blessing Babylon be a blessing to the Jews?
3. What does it mean for Christians to live in exile (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11)?
4. How can we practically be a blessing "in exile" to those around us?
5. How can Christians bless society and live expectantly, not knowing when Jesus will return?
6. What lies do some people claiming to speak in the name of the Lord tell today?
7. How can we rightly apply Jeremiah 29:11-14 to our lives?

—Tom Greene

Golden Text Illuminated

"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

God sent a message of hope through the prophet Jeremiah during Judah's darkest hour. This message would have been difficult for the people to hear and accept.

The people of Judah had been deported away from their homeland and living as exiles in a foreign land. Their dreams of a quick return to Jerusalem were dashed when Jeremiah's letter informed them that their exile would last seventy years (vs. 10). It seemed as if God had abandoned them.

Yet, despite their discouragement, God gave them a surprising command: seek Him. Despite their circumstances, God wanted His people to turn their hearts toward Him. In our most challenging times, it is crucial to seek God. When life is going well, it is easy to neglect our relationship with God. But when trials come, we recognize our desperate need for Him.

Jeremiah reminds us that seeking God wholeheartedly brings hope, even in the darkest of situations. When we focus on God's character instead of our circumstances, we gain a proper perspective. We remember that God is king over all, loving and faithful, even when our situation seems to say otherwise.

Seeking God also reassures us of His good plans for us. Just a few verses before our golden text, God declares, "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" (vs. 11). When we seek God, we find comfort in knowing that He is working all things together for our ultimate good (Rom. 8:28).

—Gene Kissinger