

## **FAITH SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON**

**August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

**What to do in Babylon**

**Focal Passage: Jeremiah 29:1-14**

**Cross References: 2 Chronicles 36:10, 2 Kings 24:12, Matthew 5:43**

**Context** Because the time reference in v.2 is indefinite, various dates for this chapter have been proposed. They range from 597 B.C. (the year of the deportation of Jehoiachin) through 595, 594, and 593 B.C., down to 587 B.C. On balance, the chapter may be placed a few years after the exile of 597 B.C.

More important than the precise date are the contents of the chapter. In it we have the first letter recorded in the Bible (vv.4-23). In addition, chapter 29 refers briefly to other letters.

The historical situation of the chapter was that in 597 B.C., some three thousand Jews had been exiled with Jehoiachin, among them a number of priests and prophets along with the royal household. In Jerusalem, Jeremiah heard that some exiled false prophets were predicting an early fall of Babylon and an early restoration of the exiles to Judah. Jeremiah's letters warned the exiles against this deception and urged them to wait patiently for God's time.

Feinberg, Charles L. "9. Jeremiah's letters to the exiles (29:1-32)" In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*: Volume 6. 551-552. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, © 1986.

### **Bible in a Year Daily Readings** **Aug. 9<sup>th</sup> – Aug. 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

Aug. 9<sup>th</sup> Jeremiah 18-21

Aug. 10<sup>th</sup> Jeremiah 22-24

Aug. 11<sup>th</sup> Jeremiah 25-27

Aug. 12<sup>th</sup> Jeremiah 28-30

Aug. 13<sup>th</sup> Jeremiah 31-32

Aug. 14<sup>th</sup> Jeremiah 33-36

Aug. 15<sup>th</sup> Jeremiah 37-39

### **Highlights of the Week**

**Jeremiah 18** The Parable of the Potter

**Jeremiah 20** Jeremiah Cries Out to God

**Jeremiah 21** God Rejects Zedekiah's Request.

**Jeremiah 23** God Will Raise up a Righteous Branch

**Jeremiah 24** Good and Bad Figs

**Jeremiah 25** Seventy Years in Babylon

**Jeremiah 28** The False Prophet Hannaniah

**Jeremiah 29** A letter to the exiles

**Jeremiah 30, 33** The Restoration of Israel

**Jeremiah 35** The Recabites

**Jeremiah 36** Zedekiah Burns Jeremiah's Scroll. The Scroll is Rewritten

**Jeremiah 38:1-13** Jeremiah Thrown in a Cistern

**Jeremiah 39** The Fall of Jerusalem

## Jeremiah 29:1-3

<sup>1</sup> *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.*

<sup>2</sup> *(This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.)*

<sup>3</sup> *He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiyah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said:*

### NOTE:

The first three verses serve as an introduction to the letter. The information below from the Expositor's Commentary helps to give the letter context and provides some background.

Who were the "surviving elders" (v.1) to whom Jeremiah's letter was sent? One suggestion is that the word *yeter* ("remnant"; NIV, "surviving") means "chief" here (so Harrison). Although the word has this sense in some contexts, it is not demanded here. The common rendering (e.g., "surviving") is harmonious with the historical setting. Jeremiah rightly felt he still had a God-given responsibility for the "surviving elders," who were clearly those who had not succumbed to the rigors of the deportation. The suggestion has been made that resistance to the Babylonian rule had issued in the death of many elders (so Freedman). Though it is impossible to be completely certain of what had happened, it is clear that some form of community organization like that in Judah had been continued in the Exile. Verse 1 says that the letter was directed not only to the elders but to all the exiles. The "queen mother" (v.2) was Nehushta (cf. 13:18; 2 Kings 24:8). The craftsmen and artisans were deported to help King Nebuchadnezzar beautify Babylon. Jeremiah gave his letter to an embassy that Zedekiah sent to Nebuchadnezzar. The embassy's purpose is not stated. According to one view, it reflected the desire of the many who wanted to bring Jehoiachin back to Jerusalem and restore him to the throne he had held for three months (cf. 28:4). But it would have been strange indeed for such an aim to have Zedekiah's approval. Another view is that the embassy may have been sent with tribute and assurance of Zedekiah's loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar. This is more probable, as is the view that the embassy was sent to exonerate Zedekiah of any complicity in the plot to rebel against Babylon. At any rate, only by Zedekiah's permission could Jeremiah have sent his letter to the exiles. The members of the embassy were Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiyah. The first, probably a brother of Ahikam (cf. 26:24), agreed with Jeremiah and would have been welcome in Babylon. The other was probably a son of Josiah's high priest Hilkiyah (cf. 2 Kings 22:3-4). Babylon probably permitted communication between Judah and the exiles. The exiles were just as subject to false prophets as the people in Jerusalem were. Also, they might have been expected to heed Jeremiah's words (cf. 24:5-7). The false hope of a quick end to the Exile would only have nullified the disciplinary effects of the Exile.

Feinberg, Charles L. "a. Introduction (29:1-3)" In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*: Volume 6. 552. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, © 1986.

## Jeremiah 29:4-7

<sup>4</sup> *This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:*

<sup>5</sup> *"Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.*

<sup>6</sup> *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.*

<sup>7</sup> *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."*

## DISCUSSION:

- What were God's instructions to the Jews forced to live in Babylon?
- How is this different than what they might have expected to hear?
- It is important to note that the intention of v. 6 is still Jewish wives in accordance with God's original covenant with Abraham.
- Compare v. 7 with Matthew 5:43. Why is this difficult for us?

### Jeremiah 29:8-9

<sup>8</sup> *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.*

<sup>9</sup> *They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the LORD.*

## DISCUSSION:

- What were the other prophets saying to the people?
- How was this different from Jeremiah's prophecy?
- Why should the people NOT listen to the other prophets?
- How do people today twist the Word of the Lord?
- It is important to note that as believers we speak for the Lord. We must know His Word so that our message is from Him and not contrived.

### Jeremiah 29: 10-14

<sup>10</sup> This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

<sup>13</sup> You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

<sup>14</sup> 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."

## DISCUSSION:

- When will God fulfill His promise?
- The end of v.11 is directly translated "a hopeful end."
- What is the role of the people in finding God? See v.13
- The promises of 11 and 12 do not lessen the Seventy Years. We cannot claim this verse thinking that God will just get us out of trouble. So what should we do in times of trouble?

## APPLICATION

We are limited in our perspective, limited in our understanding and limited in our patience. God is limitless in His perspective, limitless in His wisdom, and limitless in His love. We often find ourselves in the middle of terrible situations and we just want out. Times of hurting, times of struggling and times of loneliness are as common as breathing. We want those times to be short and we want to know why they are happening. But God wants us to be faithful. Whatever time you are in right now, seek God. Seek Him with all of your heart and “the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.” If you will continually seek Him you will see a hopeful end.