

Lining in Babylon or America, Pt 2 **Jeremiah 29:3-4, 8-14**

Review of last week.

The context of the letter is 29:3 - King Zedekiah of Judah sent Elasah and Gemariah to Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, on a diplomatic mission. During this mission, they delivered Jeremiah's letter to the exiles already in Babylon.

V 4 – The boot of the oppressor (Babylon) is on the necks of the exiles, and God put it there. God is the first cause of all things. The exiles are in Babylon because they broke covenant with God. But even in their suffering the curse, God would use them to glorify His name, and to give them a future and hope.

But before we see how this will happen in verses 5-7, we need discuss vs. 8-14. We begin with vs. 8-9. These verses warn the exiles not to listen to the false prophets and their messages. You need to understand these verses before you can understand verses 5-7, for vs. 5-7 are the point of the letter.

Vs. 8-9 - Don't listen to your lying prophets. The ones who are telling you what you want to hear; you are encouraging them to lie. They know what you want to hear, so, for the sake of popularity, prestige and ego, they tell you what you want to hear instead of the truth, which you do not want to hear. You want to feel good instead of being transformed into God-worshippers. And the lying prophets are more than willing to take your wishful thinking and say it is from God.

Jeremiah 28:1-4 - A lying prophet, Hananiah, said, "Two years, and we're going home." That is what the people wanted to hear; but it was not the truth.

Jeremiah 28:5-11 - After Jeremiah challenges Hananiah's prediction, Hananiah walks up to Jeremiah and breaks the yoke bars that Jeremiah is wearing around his neck.

What are these yoke bars?

At the beginning of Chapter 27, God told Jeremiah to make a yoke out of straps and crossbars and wear it as a symbol for what God was going to do to Judah and the nations surrounding her for their rebellion against Him; that is He will make these nations subjects of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. These bars were not to be broken until another superpower subdued Nebuchadnezzar. When this happens, then the time of the exile would be over.

Why does Hananiah do this? To convince the people that what he predicted was from God. It was a political stunt.

The arrogance of false teachers and false prophets knows no bounds. They will lie, cheat, and steal and convince you that what they are doing is good. And many of us will believe them because they tell us what we want to hear, so we can ignore the truth which often times hurts and is hard, but it is the truth that sets us free.

Jeremiah doesn't confront Hananiah at the time; he waits, and then he hears from the Lord.

Jeremiah 28:14-17 – Jeremiah confronts Hananiah with the truth—the truth he should have spoken. Also, Jeremiah predicts Hananiah’s death, which comes true in v. 17.

There's the warning against the wrong kind of optimism. An optimism that lies. An optimism that's just wishful thinking, but somehow becomes truth. It is one thing to wish for something, it is another thing to convince yourself and others that this wish is truth.

We're not called to an optimism that's just wishful thinking. To make wishful thinking work, you need to lie. You need to manipulate, shame, confuse, and do a host of other things to convince people that the wish is reality.

Jeremiah 29:10 – The truth of the exiles’ stay is 70 years. This will happen when King Cyrus of the Medes and Persians conquers Babylon, and decrees that the exiles can go home. It will take another 30 years for a total of 100 years before this happens.

With this information in hand, Jeremiah 29:11 means that the promise of this verse is for the the corporate body, the covenant community, the exiles in Babylon. It is also a multi-generational promise, for many of these exiles from Judah and Jerusalem who are hearing this letter, will not experience the return, but their children and grandchildren will.

They are the ones who will experience the gracious promise of the Lord. The current exiles have the hope of this promise. Their hope and their future lie in God’s gracious promise to the next generations experiencing the promise. You and I should be dancing with joy that our God is a covenant-keeping, promise-keeping God to the generations that follow us.

Sometimes we claim a verse, like v 11, and then consciously or unconsciously dream or desire how that verse will be accomplished in our lives. It’s called wishful thinking. It is the wrong kind of optimism. Our optimism must be found in trusting our covenant-keeping, promise-keeping God.

Jeremiah 29:12-14 – The result of God’s promise is that they will be filled with truth and with optimism based on that truth which will drive them to seek obey, and worship the Lord. They will know that He is faithful now and to the generations to come.

This is the covenant community. This is the people of God. This is God's faithfulness throughout the generations to the people he calls his own.

That's the optimism that Jeremiah 29:11 is intended to bring.

Application

So, Bethel and the American church, we have a decision to make. Will we listen to the false teachers and the false prophets of those both within and without the church, who will say anything to make us feel good, or will we listen to the truth of God’s Word even if it is hard and hurts our feelings?

How concerned are we about the generations who will come after us? Are we willing and do we have the courage to live life trusting the word of our covenant-keeping, promise-keeping God, or is our wishful thinking driving our vision for the future? Our children’s and grandchildren’s souls are at stake.

