

# Jeremiah

## Chapter 29

### *Jeremiah's Letter to the Exiles*

These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to 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 eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers 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. It said: 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; plant gardens and eat their produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But 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 find your welfare. 8 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, 9 for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD. 10 “For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile. 15 “Because you have said, ‘The LORD has raised up prophets for us in Babylon,’ 16 thus says the LORD concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, and concerning all the people who dwell in this city, your kinsmen who did not go out with you into exile: 17 ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, behold, I am sending on them sword, famine, and pestilence, and I will make them like vile figs that are so rotten they cannot be eaten. 18 I will pursue them with sword, famine, and pestilence, and will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, a terror, a hissing, and a reproach among all the nations where I have driven them, 19 because they did not pay attention to my words, declares the LORD, that I persistently sent to you by my servants the prophets, but you would not listen, declares the LORD.’ 20 Hear the word of the LORD, all you exiles whom I sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon: 21 ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying a lie to you in my name: Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall strike them down before your eyes. 22 Because of them this curse shall be used by all the exiles from Judah in Babylon: “The LORD make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire,” 23 because they have done an outrageous thing in Israel, they have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives, and they have spoken in my name lying words that I did not command them. I am the one who knows, and I am witness, declares the LORD.’”

29:1–32 Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles of 597 B.C. (vv. 4–23) is followed by God’s message of judgment against the false prophet Shemaiah (vv. 24–32). (CSB)

**29:1-23** The future of God's people lies with the exiles, taken from Jerusalem to Babylon in 587 BC. God's judgment must fall upon His rebellious people. Yet God's favor rests upon the exiles, and they are encouraged to settle down for a long stay, after which God will return them to Jerusalem. God will restore them to the Promised Land and ultimately bring from their descendants a Savior for all the people. (PBC)

**29:1** *Jeremiah the prophet* – Jeremiah's prophecies of certain disaster met with opposition and ridicule, not only at home but also in Babylon, where King Jehoiachin, influenced people of Judah, and skilled craftsmen were exiled prisoners of Nebuchadnezzar. (TLSB)

Just as certain false prophets in Jerusalem had tried to arouse and maintain false hopes in the inhabitants of the capital, thus also certain men of the same type were active among the exiles who had been taken to Babylon at the time of Jeconiah. The result was that a spirit of discontent and restlessness took hold of the Jews, which not only increased the bitterness of their affliction, but also tended to break down all moral restraint. Jeremiah therefore, by God's command, sent a letter to the exiled Jews, in which he gives them some excellent rules of behavior in the midst of the trying circumstances in which they found themselves. (Kretzmann)

*words of the letter* – Written after 597 BC Jeremiah's letter would reach them by the same couriers who bore an official communication from King Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar (v.3). (TLSB)

*surviving elders* – To those who had survived the hardships of the exile up to that time. (Kretzmann)

Some would have succumbed to the rigors of the forced march from Jerusalem. (TLSB)

**29:2** *queen mother*. Nehushta (2Ki 24:8). (CSB)

*eunuchs, the officials*. These were the courtiers or chamberlains, high court officers. (Kretzmann))

*craftsmen and ...metal workers* – Only the poorest and weakest people were left behind in Judah (see 2Ki 24:14). (CSB)

**29:3** *the letter was sent by hand*. Placed it in the ancient equivalent of the diplomatic pouch to ensure its safe arrival. (CSB)

Nothing further being known of the message carried by this embassy, except that Zedekiah ruled only by the pleasure of the Babylonian king and was bound to use the highest diplomacy to hold his position). (Kretzmann)

*Shaphan*. Perhaps the father also of Ahikam (see 26:24 and note) and/or Gemariah (see 36:10), both of whom were sympathetic to Jeremiah and his mission. (CSB)

*Elasah*. May have been a brother of Ahikam, who befriended the prophet (26:24). (TLSB)

*Hilkiah*. Perhaps the Hilkiah who was high priest under Josiah (see 2Ki 22:12, where Hilkiah and one or more Shaphans are mentioned together). (CSB)

*Zedekiah ... sent to King Nebuchadnezzar*. Possibly at or about the same time (593 B.C.) that Zedekiah himself went to Babylon for a brief period (see 51:59). The purpose of the journey(s) is unknown. (CSB)

Perhaps Zedekiah was sending tribute to Babylon, or the delegation was to assure Nebuchadnezzar of his refusal to support the plot instigated by the neighboring states (27:1–7). The bearers of the letter seem to have sided with Jeremiah. (TLSB)

**29:4 I.** The Lord (see v. 7). Since it is God who has exiled his people, they are to submit to their captors and not rebel against them. (CSB)

**29:5–9** Instead of believing the false prophets whom God did not send, the exiles were to engage in activities that anticipated a prolonged sojourn on foreign soil, such as building houses, planting gardens, and founding families. (TLSB)

**29:5** *Build ... plant.* Reminiscent of Jeremiah's call (see 1:10), but here used in a literal sense. (CSB)

They were to prepare for a long stay in the land of their captivity, against the advice of the false prophets who were trying to mislead them. This was altogether in agreement with the idea that their homes would, for some time, be in the strange country. (Kretzmann)

*live in them.* Ezekiel, e.g., lived in his own house in Babylonia (see Eze 8:1). (CSB)

**29:6** *give your daughters.* But among the exiles themselves, not among the women of Babylonia (cf. Dt 7:3–4; Ezr 9:1–2). (CSB)

The giving in marriage is essentially a function of the parents, a duty which they dared not disregard. (Kretzmann)

**29:7** An unprecedented and unique concept in the ancient world: working toward and praying for the prosperity of one's captors. (CSB)

*seek the welfare of the city.* The Lord blessing a country for the sake of the believers among its citizens, and they, in turn, being benefited by the blessings which the Lord grants their country. (Kretzmann)

*city.* Every place in which the exiles settle down. (CSB)

*Pray ... on its behalf.* For Babylon. (TLSB)

Such intercessions being commanded by God even in the case of a heathenish government; for true religion teaches patient submission to the government in all things which are not in conflict with God's Word. (Kretzmann)

**29:8** *do not let your ...diviners ... deceive you.* It was the attitude of the people themselves, in encouraging prophecies of this kind, which gave them false hopes, that was at the bottom of the whole situation. (Kretzmann)

*among you.* The exiles in Babylon had their share of false prophets (see vv. 21, 31), who had doubtless accompanied them when they were deported in 597 B.C. (CSB)

**29:9** With a lie they posed as prophets. They used God's name adorning their base deceptions with the name of the Lord, insisting that He had sent them. The Lord had not sent them and their claims being

utterly unfounded. Over against their deceitful promises, therefore, He tells them the plain truth concerning the length of their captivity. (Kretzmann)

**29:10** *seventy years.* The city of Babylon was captured by the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C. (near the end of Jeremiah's 70 years). (CSB)

The enemies thus being punished in turn, even as it happened when the Medes and Persians under the command of Cyrus overthrew the Babylonian empire. (Kretzmann)

*bring you back.* In 538 and shortly afterward (see Ezr 1:7–11). (CSB)

By the time of their return they would have learned the lesson of exile. They would no longer trust in themselves and their cunning and power to maintain their national strength. They would have learned to seek the Lord with all their hearts and found that the Lord blesses those who lean wholly upon him. (PBC)

**29:11** *I know.* Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, the Lord has not forgotten his people. (CSB)

*plans for you* – He had prepared these plans with great care. His mind does not know the word “chance.” He omitted no detail because it was “too small.” He had planned out what he would, and it was all for their good. His purpose and his goal was “not to harm you, but to prosper you.” His desire was to give them a future and hope, a lively expectation of something good to come, a good he himself had promised. (PBC)

Romans 8:28 says: ““We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.”

*and not for evil.* God is the ultimate source of both prosperity and disaster (see Isa 45:7). (CSB)

There was indeed a future and hope in God's plans for the exiled people. However, only after many years would the chastisement produce the desired change in their lives. When they would again turn to the Lord with all their heart, He would keep His promise to bring them back to their homeland. (TLSB)

Literally, "future and hope," that is, the end which they desired, but which could be theirs only on condition of their showing true repentance. The Lord shows in just what manner the Jews would continue in their course: first, in vain confidence, relying upon the empty promises of the false prophets; then, in deepest despondency, believing that they were doomed. to extermination; but finally, in true repentance, when they would be accepted by the Lord. (Kretzmann)

**29:12–13** Echoed from Dt 4:29–30. The Lord's gracious gift of prosperity is contingent on his people's willingness to repent. (CSB)

**29:14** *I will bring you back.* The Hebrew for “bring back” sounds very similar to that for “captivity.” (CSB)

**29:15-23** From a brief assurance of eventual welfare (vv 10-14), Jeremiah abruptly reverts to denunciation of the prophets who, at home and abroad, deny the necessity of repentance to avert God's judgment on an apostate nation (cfc h 24). (TLSB)

**29:15** *prophets ... in Babylon.* Literally, "as far as Babylon," the people of Judah insisting that the ministry of the prophets extended far beyond the confines of the Holy Land, and that therefore the threatening prophecy had no effect upon them. (Kretzmann)

**29:16** *the king ... on throne of David. Zedekiah.* (CSB)

Zedekiah. Jeremiah personally delivered the same threat to the king (27:12–15). (TLSB)

*sits ... did not go out with you.* The Hebrew for both words is identical. King and people alike are guilty. (CSB)

**29:18** The suffering of the Judeans would become proverbial, like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (23:14; 50:40). This idea becomes a theme in Jeremiah, expressed in a litany of terms: byword, curse, desolation, execration, hissing, horror, reproach, taunt, and waste. (44:8, 22). (TLSB)

**29:19** *my servants the prophets.* God had promised that Moses would be the first in a long line of prophets who would speak in the Lord's name and serve him faithfully. (CSB)

*you would not listen.* See Eze 2:5, 7; 3:7, 11. (CSB)

Note that the change from the third to the second person places the exiled Jews into the same class with those who were still in Judah, for all were alike guilty. (Kretzmann)

**29:21** *Ahab ... and Zedekiah.* Not the well-known kings (of Israel and Judah respectively); rather, they were false prophets. (CSB)

**29:22** *curse ... roasted.* The Hebrew underlying each of these words sounds like Kolaiah, the name of Ahab's father (v. 21). (CSB)

*fire.* Used in Babylonia as a method of execution (see Da 3:6, 24; this is also evident in the Code of Hammurapi, sections 25; 110; 157). (CSB)

**29:23** *done an outrageous thing* – Denoting more than an indiscretion, this term describes wanton crimes. (TLSB)

I AM A WITNESS – The Lord testifies against them, approving their condemnation. (TLSB)

**29:1–23** The future of God's people lies with the exiles, taken from Jerusalem to Babylon in 587 BC. God's judgment must fall upon His rebellious people. Yet God's favor rests upon the exiles, and they are encouraged to settle down for a long stay, after which God will return them to Jerusalem. God will restore them to the Promised Land and ultimately bring from their descendants a Savior for all the people. He keeps His promises. • Fulfill Your plans for us, O Lord, and guide us to make plans that agree with Your will. Teach us to trust Your decisions for our lives; through Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

*Shemaiah's False Prophecy*

**24 To Shemaiah of Nehelam you shall say: 25 “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: You have sent letters in your name to all the people who are in Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests, saying, 26 ‘The LORD has made you priest instead of Jehoiada the priest, to have charge in the house of the LORD over every madman who prophesies, to put him in the stocks and neck irons. 27 Now why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth who is prophesying to you? 28 For he has sent to us in Babylon, saying, “Your exile will be long; build houses and live in them, and plant gardens and eat their produce.”” 29 Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the hearing of Jeremiah the prophet. 30 Then the word of the LORD came to**

**Jeremiah: 31** “Send to all the exiles, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD concerning Shemaiah of Nehelam: Because Shemaiah had prophesied to you when I did not send him, and has made you trust in a lie, 32 therefore thus says the LORD: Behold, I will punish Shemaiah of Nehelam and his descendants. He shall not have anyone living among this people, and he shall not see the good that I will do to my people, declares the LORD, for he has spoken rebellion against the LORD.’”

**29:24-28** In reply to Jeremiah’s letter, another impostor named Shemaiah wrote from Babylon reproving priests in Jerusalem for not silencing the madman (Jeremiah), who prophesied that the exile will be long. (TLSB)

Jeremiah's letter to the men in exile had evidently caused a great stir among the false prophets in Babylon, who had predicted a speedy termination of the exile. Accordingly, one of their number promptly sent letters to Jerusalem, in the endeavor to stir up the inhabitants of the capital against Jeremiah. But the Lord, in turn, gave His servant the command to proclaim His punishment upon the man who interfered with His commands. (Kretzmann)

**29:24** *Shemaiah*. A false prophet (see v. 31). (CSB)

*Nehelamite*. The Hebrew root underlying this word is the same as that for “dreams.” (CSB)

**29:25** *Zephaniah*. Not the prophet of that name. (CSB)

The so-called "second priest," or substitute for the high priest. (Kretzmann)

**29:26** *Jehoiada*. Not the same as the priest during the days of King Joash (see 2Ki 12:7). (CSB)

*in charge of the house of the LORD*. These were men charged with keeping order throughout the Temple-grounds and buildings. (Kretzmann)

*madman*. Prophetic behavior sometimes appeared deranged to the casual observer (see 2Ki 9:11). (CSB)

The inspired prophets often being charged by their enemies with being possessed with a spirit of madness. (Kretzmann)

*stocks and irons*. ESV has stocks and neck irons. (TLSB)

This is the same as Pashur had done with Jeremiah in his day, chap. 20, 2. (Kretzmann)

**29:28** *will be long*. Here 70 years. (CSB)

**29:29** *Zephaniah*. He was apparently sympathetic toward Jeremiah (see 21:1–2; 37:3). (CSB)

This was probably done with the object of making him acquainted with the machinations of the false prophets in Babylon. (Kretzmann)

**29:31–32** The Lord’s threat against Shemaiah is similar to that against Hananiah (see 28:15–16). (CSB)

**29:31** made you trust in a lie. The message being a falsehood from beginning to end, without the slightest foundation of divine truth. (Kretzmann)

**29:32** *spoken rebellion against the Lord.* False teachers not only bring condemnation upon their own souls by their false teaching, but they also transgress against the honor of the true God, who, therefore, will not let them go unpunished. (Kretzmann)

**29:24–32** An opposition figure in Babylon (Shemaiah) tries to make trouble for Jeremiah back in Jerusalem, responding to an earlier letter of Jeremiah to the Babylonian exiles. Leaders of God’s people carry a tremendous responsibility to speak only God’s Word and not their own doctrines. Pray that the Lord would guide your words and deeds as you care for those entrusted to your leadership in family, church, or society. Take heart, knowing that God’s Word prevails, stronger than any opposing force, and it accomplishes its purpose: your salvation. • Keep us steadfast in Your Word of truth, O Lord. Amen. (TLSB)