***Jeremiah 29:1-14 Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders who were carried away captive—to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon. 2(This happened after Jeconiah the king, the queen mother, the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem.) 3The 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, 4Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. 6Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished. 7And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace. 8For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. 9For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the Lord. 10For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. 11For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.***

We’re back with Jeremiah tonight, as he writes a letter to the exiles that have been carried away to Babylon. This letter was written after exiles went to Babylon a second time in 598 BC. We know this because Jeconiah was taken in the 598 BC diaspora. By now, Jeremiah has been prophesying for 28 years. Recall with me that he prophesied more than 45 years. He has been crying out for the people to turn, telling them what was coming, and doing nothing short of begging the people to repent. Now, here he is seeing all that God said would come to pass is coming to pass, just as God promised. But, Jeremiah 29 contains a great promise of restoration for the people. God has a plan and a purpose. Likewise, He has a plan and a promise for us.

Verse 1 says *Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders who were carried away captive - to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon.*These are the words of the letter or the book. Some theologians believe that this was a book, or chapter, formed from two different communications with the people in exile. These communications appear to be separated around verse 20. Both of these communications appear to go to the same recipients. The first communication encourages the captives to adjust themselves to their circumstances in Babylon. They are assured that the captivity will last for 70 years. After this period and not before, God would restore them. Jeremiah seeks to eliminate false hopes and false teachings that the 70 years will be shortened or that somehow this is simply wrong. He tells the exiles what is getting ready to befall the people that were still in Jerusalem and Judah. God is getting ready to deal them an even harsher fate. The first communication seems to have fallen on deaf ears, so starting in verse 20, a second message is sent. This message speaks of divine judgement against false prophets. Three specifically are in view here. These three influenced the people to ignore the word of God delivered through Jeremiah. History suggests that this was during Zedekiah’s reign, likely at the beginning. Also likely, the residue of elders refers to the Sanhedrin that were carried away in Daniel 1:3. Jeremiah is sending the message God has provided to the people that have the greatest likelihood of influencing others in Babylon. He longs for them to hear and heed his advice, though they haven’t up to this point.

Verses 2-3 *(This happened after Jeconiah the king, the queen mother, the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem.) 3The 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,* After Jeconiah – this aligns with the year 598 BC. The queen is his mother as 2 Kings 24:12-15 confirms. The eunuchs can be understood as officers of the king’s court. The princes of Judah and Jerusalem are the men of influence and authority among the exiles. Jeremiah wanted to get these communications into the most impactful hands possible. Adding to the belief that this chapter is two communications is the fact that two messengers were sent to Babylon – Elasah and Gemariah. Above all, Jeremiah wanted his communications to reach the people so they would not have vain and false hope from lying prophets. Likewise today, our desperate desire is for people to hear the Truth and the Truth of Jesus to speak into their captivity freeing them from sin.

Verses 4-7 *Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. 6Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished. 7And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace.*Thus says the Lord, build houses and plant gardens. The people still flattered themselves thinking that they would soon be out of Babylon and there was no reason to settle and do the things for survival. This was partially due to ego and pride and partially because of the false prophets feeding the lies. Jeremiah delivers a rebuke – The captivity will be 70 years and you need to settle down and work. Much good can come in these years with hard work. Ecclesiastes 11:6 says - *In the morning sow your seed, And in the evening do not withhold your hand; For you do not know which will prosper, Either this or that, Or whether both alike will be good.* Jeremiah is telling the exiles that, if they want to prosper, they must set about establishing homes and sowing seeds. Make the best of this bad situation. And seek the peace of the city – pray and sincerely desire for the good of Babylon, those that hold you captive there. Do all in your power to add to the peace of Baylon. For 70 years, this will be your home and the home of your sons and daughters and grandchildren. Share in the good and the bad times of the city. This time is appointed by God. We too are called to dwell in peace and submit to earthly authority, unless it contradicts God’s Law. We are to pray for our leaders. God will execute perfect judgement in His time and will protect His people. It was true then and it is true now.

Verses 8 – 9 *For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. 9For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the Lord.* For thus says the Lord – Jeremiah continues to speak the truth on the authority of God. Do not allow your prophets or diviners to deceive you. Don’t fall for their delusions. Like the people of old, we can allow ourselves to be deceived if we are not measuring the words of those leading us in churches and elsewhere by the truth of God’s word. We must follow scripture and not be deceived. Neither listen to those that deal in dreams. This has the idea of people that claim to have dreams and speak on behalf of God. We’ve studied them before. They are sometimes called Oracles of God. There are false teachers dealing in these dreams and using them for their own profit and reputation. Remember that Daniel was called upon to interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream because all the Chaldean interpreters had failed. This was common in Babylon to have these sorcerers in the Kings court. How easy it is for those claiming to dream dreams of God to simply listen to what the people want and then repeat it back to them to please their ears. It’s still that simple today. We must stay on guard for the Truth of God.

Verses 10-14 *For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. 11For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.*After seventy years, or the Hebrew has the idea of at the very mouth of seventy years. This can be pictured as where a river empties into the sea – it is the end of the run for that river and seventy years will be the end of the captivity, allowing the Jewish people to flow back to Jerusalem. This reiterates Jeremiah’s point that it will not be shorter than 70 years. After these years are completed, God will visit and be the cause of them returning. He will perform His good words. He will keep His promise. This promise is fulfilled in the children and grandchildren and great grandchildren of those now receiving this word. Often, the Scripture makes a promise that will be fulfilled in future generations by the descendants. The blessings and promises of God are not confined to our lifetime. Verse 11 is a wonderfully encouraging verse. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you. His works always agree with His thoughts. He does exactly and perfectly as He wills. He has thoughts of peace and not of evil, good and not bad. He uses all circumstances to serve for the good of His people. To give you an expected end – this has the idea of an even better expectation and hope! Then you will call upon Me, meaning you will place your hope completely in Me and there will be no wavering or turning. All assurance will come from God. As we know it does. You will pray and I will listen! You will seek Me with a humble and contrite heart and find Me! We must seek and search diligently with pure motives. We seek Him while He may yet be found, as Isaiah 55:6 instructs us. God will gather the people and bring them back from captivity.

And so we leave Jeremiah. He is facing what all God’s children face. False teachers, false prophets, and itching ears. He is truthful and faithful to God’s directives and commandments. This has not eliminated the suffering or the trials. Neither does God eliminate ours. We walk faithfully and pray fiercely, seeking Him, believing Him a rewarder. We have been released from our captivity by Jesus. Now, we must live, build, plant, and prosper while we wait to go Home.