***Jeremiah 29 - Because you have said, “The Lord has raised up prophets for us in Babylon” -  16therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, concerning all the people who dwell in this city, and concerning your brethren who have not gone out with you into captivity— 17thus says the Lord of hosts: Behold, I will send on them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like rotten figs that cannot be eaten, they are so bad. 18And I will pursue them with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence; and I will deliver them to trouble among all the kingdoms of the earth—to be a curse, an astonishment, a hissing, and a reproach among all the nations where I have driven them, 19because they have not heeded My words, says the Lord, which I sent to them by My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; neither would you heed, says the Lord. 20Therefore hear the word of the Lord, all you of the captivity, whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon. 21Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, who prophesy a lie to you in My name: Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall slay them before your eyes. 22And because of them a curse shall be taken up by all the captivity of Judah who are in Babylon, saying, “The Lord make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire”; 23because they have done disgraceful things in Israel, have committed adultery with their neighbors’ wives, and have spoken lying words in My name, which I have not commanded them. Indeed I know, and am a witness, says the Lord. 24You shall also speak to Shemaiah the Nehelamite, saying, 25Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying: You have sent letters in your name to all the people who are at Jerusalem, 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, so that there should be officers, in the house of the Lord over every man who is demented and considers himself a prophet, that you should put him in prison and in the stocks. 27Now therefore, why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth who makes himself a prophet to you? 28For he has sent to us in Babylon, saying, ‘This captivity is long; build houses and dwell in them, and plant gardens and eat their fruit.’ 29Now Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the hearing of Jeremiah the prophet. 30Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying: 31Send to all those in captivity, saying, Thus says the Lord concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite: Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, and I have not sent him, and he has caused you to trust in a lie- 32therefore thus says the Lord: Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his family: he shall not have anyone to dwell among this people, nor shall he see the good that I will do for My people, says the Lord, because he has taught rebellion against the Lord.***

When we were last together, we learned of letters that were sent to Babylon to the people in captivity there. Jeremiah sent these by a courier provided by Zedekiah. The messages started as an encouragement for the people to build and plant and live life, assuring the people that the captivity will last seventy years, just as God said.

Tonight, we will see the message change. It moves from a message of hope to a message of condemnation for the false prophets and lying diviners telling the people that the captivity will not last long. Humans like to hear pleasing words. It was true in Jeremiah’s time, and it is true now. A call to repent, turn from evil, change ways, and pursue God with humility meets with resistance from those that love their sin. No one likes to be told we’re sinners. Everyone needs to understand we’re sinners and have fallen short of the Glory of God.

 Verse 15 says *Because you have said, “The Lord has raised up prophets for us in Babylon.”* Jeremiah is referring to false prophets, which the people hold up as true prophets raised up by God. These false prophets prophesy peace and prosperity, when they have received no such prophecy from God. God says in verse 9 *For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the Lord.* In the preceding verses, God assures the people that, when they seek Him with a humble and contrite heart, He will be found and visit them. These false prophets are leading the people contrary to God’s Truth.

Verses 16-19*therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, concerning all the people who dwell in this city, and concerning your brethren who have not gone out with you into captivity - 17thus says the Lord of hosts: Behold, I will send on them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like rotten figs that cannot be eaten, they are so bad. 18And I will pursue them with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence; and I will deliver them to trouble among all the kingdoms of the earth - to be a curse, an astonishment, a hissing, and a reproach among all the nations where I have driven them. 19because they have not heeded My words, says the Lord, which I sent to them by My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; neither would you heed, says the Lord.* Thus says the Lord to the people remaining in Jerusalem. To them, God will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence. They will become as vile as rotten figs, soured and molded. The figs must be thrown away, as they can easily cause sickness with the bacteria that ferments them. God will deal with the remaining people of Jerusalem as rotten figs and discard them. They make the nation sick. These people have made themselves vile and hateful and have turned their backs on God. Recall with me that we studied in Jeremiah 24 the vision of a basket of good figs and a basket of bad figs. God described them in verse 8-10 of chapter 24 - ‘*And as the bad figs which cannot be eaten, they are so bad’—surely thus says the Lord—‘so will I give up Zedekiah the king of Judah, his princes, the residue of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt.****9****I will deliver them to trouble into all the kingdoms of the earth, for their harm, to be a reproach and a byword, a taunt and a curse, in all places where I shall drive them.* ***10****And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence among them, till they are consumed from the land that I gave to them and their fathers*.’ In our verses tonight, God is reiterating what He spoke in Chapter 24. God will deliver them to a more severe punishment than the people that went into captivity. These folks have seen two captivities, they have been warned, yet they have broken faith and trust with God again. They pledged to follow God, and took an oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar in the name of God. They’ve broken their promises to both the earthly king and their Heavenly Father. Sword, famine, and pestilence will be their reward.

Verses 20-23 *Therefore hear the word of the Lord, all you of the captivity, whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon. 21Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, who prophesy a lie to you in My name: Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall slay them before your eyes. 22And because of them a curse shall be taken up by all the captivity of Judah who are in Babylon, saying, “The Lord make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire”; 23because they have done disgraceful things in Israel, have committed adultery with their neighbors’ wives, and have spoken lying words in My name, which I have not commanded them. Indeed I know, and am a witness, says the Lord.*God sent the people into captivity by His Will and Providence. Babylon and Assyria have been God’s instruments, just as the Medes, Greeks, and Romans will be in the future. It is His plan playing out before our eyes. These nations are His chosen vessels. Now, God names names. Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah. They are false prophets, prophesying lies in the name of God. He did not call them, and they prophesy what He did not say. We see in verse 22 that they become a curse among the people. God will slay these two because they have told lies, stirred up rebellion against Babylon, and led the people astray in the name of God. We cannot abuse God’s name and expect to get away with it. In our last evening service, we learned that God told the people to pray for and seek the peace of Babylon. The people will say in years to come, “The Lord make you like Zedekiah and Ahab” – may you be a curse and meet a similar end. Nebuchadnezzar roasted these men in fire, which must draw our mind back to Daniel 3 and the story of Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego. History reveals that Babylon threw people into roaring furnaces blazing high with fire, but they also roasted people slowly to extend their suffering. The word used in verse 22 suggests the slow roasting was Zedekiah and Ahab’s end. This is done because they have done villainy or disgraceful things: adultery and lying. Adultery was punishable by death in Israel and in Babylon as well. Many nations considered adultery a capital punishment offense.

Verses 24-28 *You shall also speak to Shemaiah the Nehelamite, saying, 25Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying: You have sent letters in your name to all the people who are at Jerusalem, 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, so that there should be officers in the house of the Lord over every man who is demented and considers himself a prophet, that you should put him in prison and in the stocks. 27Now therefore, why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth who makes himself a prophet to you? 28For he has sent to us in Babylon, saying, ‘This captivity is long; build houses and dwell in them, and plant gardens and eat their fruit.* Now, our attention turns to Shemaiah*.* Jeremiah is instructed to send the second message to Shemaiah. This is in answer to a message that Shemaiah has sent to Zephaniah saying that God appointed Him, Shemaiah, as the high-priest. Zephaniah, according to Jeremiah 52:24 is second priest. Azariah or perhaps Seraiah, Azariah’s son, were the High-Priest, but were likely taken into captivity or otherwise unavailable to serve in their capacity. Zephaniah, the second priest, was serving as high priest in this absence. Jehoiada also served in priestly role, as the chaos of captivity ensued. Shemaiah rebukes Zephaniah for not rebuking Jeremiah for telling the truth that God gave him. Shemaiah complains that Jeremiah is saying build houses and plant and raise families. The captivity will be long. Shemaiah is accusing Jeremiah of being demented and possessed by an evil spirit for speaking such things. He is calling Jeremiah a false prophet.

Verses 29-32 *Now Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the hearing of Jeremiah the prophet. 30Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying: 31Send to all those in captivity, saying, Thus says the Lord concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite: Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, and I have not sent him, and he has caused you to trust in a lie - 32therefore thus says the Lord: Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his family: he shall not have anyone to dwell among this people, nor shall he see the good that I will do for My people, says the Lord, because he has taught rebellion against the Lord.* Zephaniah reads this letter to Jeremiah and God tells Jeremiah how to respond. This is similar to what Jesus tells us will happen in Matthew 10:19-20. Jesus says - *But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak;****20****for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.* The Spirit speaks now through Jeremiah. God tells all in captivity that He has not sent Shemaiah or spoken through him. In fact, Shemaiah has caused people to trust lies. God will punish Shemaiah. Like Hananiah in Jeremiah 28, Shemaiah will be punished. He nor any of his family will remain when the Jews are restored to their homeland. He taught rebellion, falsely claiming that God spoke through him and gave him a revelation. He spoke falsely claiming a position he was not given and in direct rebellion against God’s anointed. The rebellion is not against Jeremiah though or even Babylon, but against the Lord! When we speak contrary to the Truth of God’s Word, and against God’s anointed, we are not speaking against man, but God. We are in rebellion against God’s Truth.

And so, we leave Jeremiah again tonight. Chapter 29 has been a chapter of great Hope and a chapter of great rebuke. When we accept Jesus, we all become His witnesses, bearing God’s Truth to all that will receive. We must be very faithful to His Word and lead others in alignment with the Bible. Too many today want to update or water down God’s Word. This is rebellion and sin and those doing so will be judged. In Acts 4:19, we read - *But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge*. We all know the answer and we are told the answer in Acts 5:29*, But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men*.” Likewise, let’s be like Jeremiah, let’s be like Peter, let’s faithfully obey God and witness boldly for His Son Jesus. We know what is right and we will faithfully obey our God in 2025.