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**APOSTOLIC VERSE BY VERSE BIBLE STUDY**

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**“GOD’S THOUGHTS ABOUT ME”**

**Jeremiah 29:1-32**

***Jeremiah 29:1 "Now these [are] the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon;"***

Many had been carried into captivity into Babylon. This letter is sent to them. The word "residue" lets us know there had been more elders than were living now. Jeremiah could have dictated this letter to someone to write to the people. Jeremiah was well known to them, because he had prophesied to them, while they were still in Jerusalem. We discussed before that Jeremiah had remained in Jerusalem. The priests and prophets were treated no differently than the average person. They were taken captive, too.

***Jeremiah 29:2 "(After that Jeconiah the king, and the queen, and the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, and the carpenters, and the smiths, were departed from Jerusalem;)"***

Jeconiah spent his days of captivity in Babylon. They were departed because they were captured. The queen, here, is possibly speaking of the queen mother. The eunuchs were used as servants in the king's house. They were, probably, chambermen.

***Jeremiah 29:3 "By the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent unto Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon) saying,"***

This is just explaining who took them to Babylon. It appears that Elsah and Gemariah took Jeremiah's letter to Babylon when they took these captives there. They were sent by Zedekiah. As a result of the damaging lies spread by false prophets like Hananiah, the exiles had been encouraged to become passive in their captivity, sitting around waiting for a quick release that wasn’t coming. Jeremiah’s letter offered a reliable ray of light to them, but it also includes a critically important message for believers today. It teaches the foundational principle that society is transformed when God’s people execute his agenda in history. Through Jeremiah, God laid out his strategy for the Israelites in Babylon, explaining how to live and prosper in a pagan land.

***Jeremiah 29:4 "Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon;"***

29: 4 The first thing the exiles needed to learn was that the Babylonians were not to blame for their captivity. In the grand scheme of things, God had deported them to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was merely the instrument God used to punish them for their sins. God’s message through Jeremiah here was essentially this: “You’re in this mess because I sent you there. And I sent you there because you forgot me.” It was their failure to be God’s distinct people who worshiped him alone that caused God to judge them. They are there, because God had judged them, and now is chastening them, so they will repent and return to worship of God. God has not forgotten them. He still loves them. The captivity is for their own good. The main difference in this prophecy, and the ones we have been reading that Jeremiah gave, is this one was written. Jeremiah sent the message by letter because he could not be there in person.

***Jeremiah 29:5 "Build ye houses, and dwell [in them]; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them;"***

***Jeremiah 29:6 "Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished."***

It appears from this, that they had hesitated to do anything permanent, because they thought they would not be captive for long. Now, God is telling them, it will be for a long time. They must not be idle. They must be working while they are captives. Instead of complaining about the captivity, they should be making the best of it. They should build houses, and plant gardens to supply their own needs. They must be a good example to these heathen people. In an unusual way, they will represent God to these heathens. The way they live in adverse circumstances, will tell their heathen captives about their faith in God. We must remember that they had been reduced to a remnant. Many had died from famine, others died by the sword. The few left must now multiply, and not die out. They are to go ahead and marry, just as they would if they were at home. Babylon will be their home for a long time. God’s agenda for the exiles covered everything from their employment to building their families. Hananiah had led the people to believe they would return home soon, as if they didn’t need to do anything. As it was with the Babylonian exiles, so it is with Christians today. We need to prepare to do life because we might be here for a while. God wanted his people to establish a kingdom presence in exile. Building houses and planting gardens suggests ownership, a key element of a kingdom economic strategy. And ownership always requires some sort of investment. God told the exiles that while they were waiting for a better tomorrow, they were to be industrious today. The exiles of Judah needed to understand that the Babylonians were not their problem; God was. And if God is your problem, then God is your only solution. It doesn’t matter whom we elect or what programs we start if we lose our spiritual perspective. We have to see that God put us here for a reason. Earth is not merely a place to wait for a ride to heaven. It’s where we live out God’s kingdom agenda in history.

***Jeremiah 29:7 "And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace."***

***Jeremiah 29:8 "For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that [be] in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed."***

***Jeremiah 29:9 "For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the LORD."***

They should act with respect to their captors. They should pray for the peace of Babylon because it will bring peace to them, as well, since they are living there now. Jeremiah had prophesied against these false prophets before they went into captivity. He now warns them again, not to listen to the false prophets, diviners, and dreamers. Their own dreams are the ones they have imagined. Sometimes they dream of things they were thinking about before they went to bed. It is important to be able to determine whether a dream is of God, or not. They pretend they are of God by saying, "Thus saith the LORD", but their prophecies are false. They are not of God. One false prophecy was that they would only be in captivity just two or three years.

***Jeremiah 29:10 "For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place***."

***Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."***

God does not leave them in the dark. He tells them they will be captives for 70 years. They must keep the faith and remain loyal to God in this heathen land. If they are faithful, God will bring them home after the 70 years. God's thoughts are not evil toward them. He loves them. He promises them their freedom, after the 70 years. He has given them something to look forward to. This captivity is to make them repent and return to God. It is for their good, not God's. God's thoughts are upon them constantly. He loves them and wants to fellowship with them. The inanimate objects, they had been worshipping, had no power of thought. To mention the thoughts of God, shows Him to be a living Spirit. God promised to restore his people when the seventy years of captivity ended. Many Christians are familiar with Jeremiah 29:11, but they don’t know its context. This is God’s promise to bless his people in the midst of a pagan culture. And it takes on greater significance when it’s seen in the context of exile with no apparent hope.

***Jeremiah 29:12 "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you."***

***Jeremiah 29:13 "And ye shall seek me, and find [me], when ye shall search for me with all your heart."***

God has not stopped listening to their prayers, neither has He stopped listening for their prayers. Praying to God is a way of fellowshipping with Him. It is, also, a way of expressing belief in Him. "Hearken" is to listen intently. God is interested in the heart of man. They had to believe in their hearts that God existed, before they would seek Him. He is never far away. When they seek God, it is inevitable that they will find Him. He wants to be found. He was there all the time waiting for them to seek Him. The heart is what man is.

***Deuteronomy 30:1-3***

***30 And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee,***

***2 And shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul;***

***3 That then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee.***

Notice, though, that this promise was conditioned on God’s people seeking him in a new way. The economic titans and power brokers of the world can’t help us like God can but enjoying this kind of blessing requires seeking God wholeheartedly. The following Scripture speaks of the importance of the heart.

***Hebrews 10:22 "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."***

This demands more than attending church on Sunday, tapping our feet to the music, hearing a sermon, and saying, “Amen.” Unless we commit our hearts to the Lord 24/7, we will be no different twelve months from now. But when we worship and obey the Lord through our day-to-day walk with him, he’s ready to communicate with us and even reverse our circumstances.

***Jeremiah 29:14 "And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive."***

This is not only speaking of bringing them back from captivity to their promised land, but it, also, speaks of them being restored to fellowship with their God. The covenant made to Abraham is still theirs if they obey God. The return to their homeland is a prophecy fulfilled just after the 70 years, but is, also, speaking of the return of the natural Jew to the Holy Land now.

***Jeremiah 29:15 "Because ye have said, The LORD hath raised us up prophets in Babylon;"***

This is speaking more of the present, than of the future. God is explaining, again, why He is punishing them. They do not want to keep Jeremiah as their prophet. They would rather listen to the false prophets.

***Jeremiah 29:16 "[Know] that thus saith the LORD of the king that sitteth upon the throne of David, and of all the people that dwelleth in this city, [and] of your brethren that are not gone forth with you into captivity;"***

***Jeremiah 29:17 "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will send upon them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil."***

The throne of David had now been taken over by an evil king. Those, who were not willing to be chastened of God by captivity, will be thought of as God's rebellious children. They will be severely punished. They are so evil; they will not even allow God to teach them His ways. They refuse to receive their rightful punishment from God. They are rebellious, and God will bring famine and the sword to destroy them. "Vile figs" are good for nothing, but to destroy. Figs symbolize the house of Israel.

***Jeremiah 29:18 "And I will persecute them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, and an astonishment, and an hissing, and a reproach, among all the nations whither I have driven them:"***

We discussed that this is like rebellious children. Rebellion was thought of as witchcraft. They had been unfaithful to God. They had an opportunity to be chastised for their unfaithfulness but refused even that. Now, God has given up on changing them, and will deal harshly with them. Everywhere they go, they will be thought of as outcasts. They will have no respect shown them at all.

***Jeremiah 29:19 "Because they have not hearkened to my words, saith the LORD, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending [them]; but ye would not hear, saith the LORD."***

They had ears to hear, but they did not hear. They did not listen to the warnings God sent them by the prophets.

***Jeremiah 29:20 "Hear ye therefore the word of the LORD, all ye of the captivity, whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon:"***

***Jeremiah 29:21 "Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, of Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and of Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, which prophesy a lie unto you in my name; Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall slay them before your eyes;"***

This just repeats, again, that the captivity in Babylon was brought on by God. It appears from this, that Ahab and Zedekiah were false prophets. They had become prophets of their own volition, and not because God had called them. They spoke as if God had sent them. Their message was a lie. Strangely enough Nebuchadnezzar will slay them.

***Jeremiah 29:22 "And of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captivity of Judah which [are] in Babylon, saying, The LORD make thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire;"***

These false prophets were put into a fiery furnace and burned to death. The people started calling this a curse. The punishment for extremely sinful acts during this time was death by fire. We will read, in the book of Daniel, how the Babylonians put Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego in a fiery furnace. The difference is, they belonged to God, and God did not let the fire burn them. The false prophets did not have God's help, and they burned.

***Jeremiah 29:23 "Because they have committed villany in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives, and have spoken lying words in my name, which I have not commanded them; even I know, and [am] a witness, saith the LORD."***

They called themselves prophets, but they did not live the holy set-aside life required of a prophet. In fact, they committed physical and spiritual adultery. They were not only full of lies, but they lied and said God speaking through them. God is the witness against them. The villainy they committed in Israel, was, probably, sexual in nature.

***Jeremiah 29:24 "[Thus] shalt thou also speak to Shemaiah the Nehelamite, saying,"***

***Jeremiah 29:25 "Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, Because thou hast sent letters in thy name unto all the people that [are] at Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests, saying,"***

Jeremiah had sent a letter to those in Babylon, speaking directly of terrible things about to occur. It appears, that Shemaiah, a false prophet, reacted by sending letters to Jerusalem and to the priests. The worst part of the letters was that he used the LORD's name in them, as if the LORD had him send them.

***Jeremiah 29:26 "The LORD hath made thee priest in the stead of Jehoiada the priest, that ye should be officers in the house of the LORD, for every man [that is] mad, and maketh himself a prophet, that thou shouldest put him in prison, and in the stocks."***

This was an attempt to have Jeremiah locked up as a mad man. Shemaiah thought, if he flattered the priest, he would do as he asked. He says, "You have the authority, just lock Jeremiah up".

***Jeremiah 29:27 "Now therefore why hast thou not reproved Jeremiah of Anathoth, which maketh himself a prophet to you?"***

***Jeremiah 29:28 "For therefore he sent unto us [in] Babylon, saying, This [captivity is] long: build ye houses, and dwell [in them]; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them."***

***Jeremiah 29:29 "And Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the ears of Jeremiah the prophet."***

This is spoken to the priest that took the place of Jehoiada. He is accusing Jeremiah of being a self-appointed prophet. He accused Jeremiah of something God had put in Jeremiah's mouth. The accusation was truth, Jeremiah did say these things, or God did. Instead of Zephaniah locking Jeremiah up as a mad man, he read him the letter.

***Jeremiah 29:30 "Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying,"***

***Jeremiah 29:31 "Send to all them of the captivity, saying, Thus saith the LORD concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite; Because that Shemaiah hath prophesied unto you, and I sent him not, and he caused you to trust in a lie:"***

***Jeremiah 29:32 "Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite, and his seed: he shall not have a man to dwell among this people; neither shall he behold the good that I will do for my people, saith the LORD; because he hath taught rebellion against the LORD."***

God quickly replies to these false accusations against Jeremiah. Just about the worst thing that could happen to a Hebrew, was not to have sons to carry on the family name. Of course, this was not the only punishment spoken against Shemaiah. He would not live to see the return to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. Shemaiah was disclosed as a false prophet {God did not send him}. The reason for the punishment, was that he taught rebellion.

**QUESTIONS**

1. How did Jeremiah get his prophecy to Babylon?
2. Who did he send it to?
3. Who were the two men who actually carried them captive to Babylon?
4. What did Jeremiah tell them to do {in verse 5}?
5. Why was it so important for them to marry and have a family?
6. Why should they pray for the peace of Babylon?
7. The false prophets pretended they were of God by saying what?
8. After \_\_\_ years, God will visit them and cause them to return?
9. What thoughts did God have toward them?
10. What does the mention of God having thoughts show us about Him?
11. What wonderful promise does God give them in verse 12?
12. What is verse 14 speaking of?
13. The covenant of Abraham is still theirs, if they \_\_\_\_\_\_ God.
14. Because they listened to false prophets, what will happen to them?
15. They had ears to hear but did not \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
16. Name two of the false prophets.
17. What happened to both of them?
18. What were some of their sins, besides prophesying falsely?
19. Who sent letters that were against Jeremiah?
20. What did he want them to do to Jeremiah?
21. What was he accusing Jeremiah of?
22. What reaction did Zephaniah have to the letter?
23. What happens to Shemaiah?