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Sermon Title: The Letter Jeremiah Sent to the Exiled People of Judah in Babylon

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Scripture: Jeremiah 29:1-14

*(Jeremiah 29:1) This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets, and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.*

*(Jeremiah 29:2) (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials, and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers, and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.)*

*(Jeremiah 29:3) He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said:*

*(Jeremiah 29:4) This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:*

*(Jeremiah 29:5) "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.*

*(Jeremiah 29:6) Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.*

*(Jeremiah 29:7) Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."*

*(Jeremiah 29:8) Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have.*

*(Jeremiah 29:9) They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the Lord.*

*(Jeremiah 29:10) This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.*

*(Jeremiah 29:11) For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

*(Jeremiah 29:12) Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.*

*(Jeremiah 29:13) You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*

*(Jeremiah 29:14) “I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”*

## Jeremiah's Ministry Expands Beyond Judah to Babylon.

During the reign of King Jehoiakim in 605 BC and again during the reign of King Jehoiachin in 597 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Jerusalem.

As a result, the people of Judah were taken captive in two separate deportations and forced to live in communal settlements by the Kebar River in Babylon.

However, they held a misguided belief in temple theology, thinking that God resided only in Jerusalem, where His temple stood.

They assumed that since they were now in Babylon, God was not with them. Without the temple of the Lord, they believed they could not worship properly and, therefore, could not receive God's blessings.

This mistaken belief robbed them of hope and plunged them into deep despair. They lived each day without purpose, merely enduring their circumstances.

To these hopeless exiles, the prophet Jeremiah delivered a message of hope from God.

Jeremiah delivers God's message that their present suffering is not a disaster but a future filled with hope.

*(Jeremiah 29:11) "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

This means that everything is part of God's sovereign plan.

God tells the people of Judah that their exile in Babylon will last for seventy years. He warns them not to be deceived by the false prophets who claim they will return soon.

Instead, He instructs them to settle in Babylon—marry, have children, and allow their children to marry and have grandchildren—so they may prosper there.

Moreover, He urges them to seek Him with all their hearts.

If they do, He will reveal Himself to them and, when the time is right, bring them back to their homeland in Jerusalem.

*(Jeremiah 29:12) "Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you."*

*(Jeremiah 29:13) "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."*

*(Jeremiah 29:14) "I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."*

These words from God became an immense source of comfort and hope for the people of Judah, who were living in Babylon with no sense of purpose or expectation for the future.

Jeremiah sends a letter through the envoys that King Zedekiah of Judah dispatched to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, delivering God's message to the exiled people of Judah living there.

The mention of "King Jehoiachin, the queen mother, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the artisans having left

Jerusalem" suggests that this event took place after the second deportation in 597 BC.

*(Jeremiah 29:1) The prophet Jeremiah sent this letter from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles, as well as to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.*

*(Jeremiah 29:2) (This was after King Jehoiachin, the queen mother, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the artisans had left Jerusalem.)*

*(Jeremiah 29:3) He sent the letter through Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom King Zedekiah of Judah had sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon.*

Since Elasah and Gemariah were dispatched as envoys to Babylon, it is likely that they were pro-Babylonian figures.

If so, they would have supported Jeremiah's message, which urged the people of Judah to surrender to Babylon and willingly accept their exile there.

God speaks to the exiled people of Judah, who are living in despair, assuring them that their current suffering is not merely a disaster but part of His sovereign plan for their future and hope.

The people of Judah were consumed with anxiety over when they would return to Jerusalem.

However, God indicates that their exile will last for an extended period and instructs them to settle down and prepare for life in Babylon.

*(Jeremiah 29:4) This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:*

*(Jeremiah 29:5) "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce."*

*(Jeremiah 29:6) "Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease."*

At the time, the people of Judah believed that King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had invaded their land and taken them captive by his own power.

However, God makes it clear that He, the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, is the one who orchestrated their exile to Babylon.

God commands the exiled people of Judah in Babylon to settle down and live there.

He instructs them to build houses and plant gardens, eating the produce of their labor.

He also tells them to marry, have children, and give their children in marriage so that they may multiply and not decrease.

By emphasizing these instructions, God indicates that their exile will last for a long time, contrary to the false prophets' claims.

He explicitly mentions three generations, saying:

*"Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease."*

This directly contradicts the false prophets, who falsely proclaimed that the exile would end in just two years and that the people would soon return to Jerusalem. Instead, it aligns with Jeremiah's prophecy that the exile would last for seventy years, which also corresponds with the actual duration of Babylon's rule.

Jeremiah urges the people of Judah to pray for the peace of Babylon.

*(Jeremiah 29:7) "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."*

For the exiled people of Judah, who were forcibly taken to Babylon after its invasion, this command was not easy to accept.

However, upon deeper reflection, it becomes clear that this instruction is ultimately for their own well-being rather than for Babylon's.

For the exiles to thrive and prosper in Babylon, the peace of the city is essential. If Babylon were to fall into chaos or suffer an invasion, the exiled people of Judah living there would inevitably suffer as well.

Therefore, praying for Babylon's peace is, in reality, a way to secure their own stability and survival.

However, among the exiled people of Judah in Babylon, there were those who cunningly exploited their fears—namely, false prophets, diviners, and dreamers. God warns His people not to listen to these false prophets, who prophesy lies in His name even though He did not send them.

*(Jeremiah 29:8) "This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have."*

*(Jeremiah 29:9) "They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them, declares the Lord."*

The exiled people of Judah, who held onto their temple-centered theology, believed that **there** was no hope in Babylon.

Because of this, they desperately longed for a swift return to their homeland, Jerusalem.

False prophets in Babylon were well aware of these feelings and exploited them by delivering sweet, deceptive messages, telling the exiles exactly what they wanted to hear.

Just like Hananiah and other false prophets in Judah, they falsely prophesied an imminent return, offering empty words of comfort that only misled the people.

God sternly warns against being deceived by these false prophets, diviners, and dreamers, declaring that He did not send them.

Then, God reveals His plan, His purpose, and His intentions for the people of Judah.

First, He declares the duration of their exile in Babylon.

Although He has instructed them to marry, have children, and prosper in Babylon, their exile is not indefinite—there is a predetermined time set by God.

He declares that after seventy years, He will bring them back to Jerusalem.

*(Jeremiah 29:10) "This is what the Lord says: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place."*

God promises that when the seventy years are fulfilled, He will remember His people and restore them to their homeland, Jerusalem.

This also signifies that Babylon's rule will collapse after seventy years.

The phrase "I will come to you" (Hebrew: *paqad*) is the same word used when God delivered the Israelites from Egypt.

Just as God led Israel out of Egypt, He now declares that He will lead them out of Babylon.

Therefore, the return from Babylonian captivity is often regarded as a second Exodus for the people of Israel.

And God gives a message of hope.

He assures the people of Judah that His plan for them is one of peace, not of disaster.

The ultimate gift God intends to give them is a future and a hope.

*(Jeremiah 29:11) "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for peace and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."*

Although their current life may be difficult and full of hardships, if they can see a future and have hope, they can live with purpose and expectation.

Therefore, these words of God became a sufficient reason for the people of Judah to continue living with hope.

God will fulfill His good promises according to His plan when the appointed time comes.

The interrupted history of God's people will begin again with their return, and they will be recognized as the remnant of God's people.

God tells them to cry out to Him and pray, assuring them that if they seek Him with all their heart, they will find Him.

*(Jeremiah 29:12) "Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you."*

*(Jeremiah 29:13) "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."*

This means that fellowship with God is possible even in a foreign land.

Even in the unclean land of the Gentiles, without a temple, they can meet God and receive His blessings.

The limitations of the temple theology have been overcome.

This was a completely new theology for the people of Judah.

This message allowed the people of Judah to regain hope, which was as precious as life itself.

They would now carry hope in their hearts instead of despair, crying out to God in prayer and seeking Him.

And God, who hears their cries, will meet them.

The relationship between the people of Judah and God will be restored, and they will regain the privileges they once had.

They will find their way back to the promised land.

*(Jeremiah 29:14) "This is what the Lord says: I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and I will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."*

Beloved members of Church of God's Dream,

The world we live in today is as difficult and despairing as the Babylonian exile of the people of Judah.

The economy and society are in chaos.

Especially in our homeland, South Korea, even politics is in turmoil.

In such times, are there any of you who have lost hope and are living in despair?

Do not be deceived by false things that are not from God, or by sweet words that offer false hope, even if you are in desperation, trying to grasp at straws.

When we are tired and weary, it is easy to fall into such traps.

However, know that their words are all empty lies.

Cry out to God in prayer.

When you seek God with all your heart, He will meet you.

He will give you the words of His good promise.

Believe in the promise of God that you have received, and hold onto hope until the end.

The appointed time is the necessary period for becoming God's people.

God's promise will surely be fulfilled.

God's plan for us is not for disaster but for peace.

Only those who cry out and endure until the end will be acknowledged as God's people.