

# Coronavirus Online Bible Study

## *Week One- When God's Plan Isn't Our Plan!*

### **Introduction-**

Because of the sins of the people of Judah, God has handed them over to their enemies. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon has taken most of the richest and most influential people of Jerusalem and Judah into exile far away. The city of Jerusalem still stands, but is an empty shell, practically uninhabited. The two previous kings of Judah have both been taken into exile, and Zedekiah, the uncle of King Jehoiachin, has been installed as king by Nebuchadnezzar, though he has no real power. The prophet Jeremiah, at God's command, walks around wearing an ox's yoke, warning the people to serve Nebuchadnezzar and accept his "yoke". If the people willingly submit to Babylon, Jerusalem will stand, but if they rebel, Jerusalem will be destroyed. Despite this, false prophets have arisen, claiming that the exile will soon end, God will destroy the Babylonians, and the valuable items stolen from Jerusalem will soon be returned. Among these false prophets are Hananiah son of Azzur, who in Jeremiah 28 confronted Jeremiah's message and claimed to speak for God. The people weren't sure who to believe.

Those in exile face a similar predicament. Should they believe those who claim to speak for God, and prepare to return home soon, or should they "plant roots" in their new land? To address this, Jeremiah sends a letter to those taken to Babylon.

### **Read Jeremiah 29:1-3.**

Who are some of the people listed as going into exile in these verses? What conclusion can you draw about who Nebuchadnezzar took to Babylon and who he left behind in Jerusalem?

What do you imagine the effect would be on our country if all of our government officials (from both sides of the aisle) were taken away? What would life be like for those left behind?

### **Read Jeremiah 29:4-9.**

If you were among those living in exile, what message do you think you would hope to hear from Jeremiah about the length of your stay in Babylon? Is this what the people hear?

When we don't hear the answer we want from God, what effect can that have on our faith? Why do you think that is?

What verb does God use in verse 4 to refer to those in exile? Why do you think God uses this word?

What is the difference between “carried into exile” and “sent into exile”? What images does this particular phrase bring to mind?

What essentially is the message God has for the exiles in verses 5-6?

Would you say this is a positive message from God, or a negative message?

Why might verse 7 have been a “tough pill to swallow” for the Jews living in exile? How would you react to this if our nation were in a similar situation?

In verses 8-9, God says quite clearly that those that promise a quick return to Judah are lying; they neither speak the truth nor speak for God. Though these false prophets spoke the words the people wanted to hear, what we want to hear is not always God’s direction! Can you think of other examples of how the words people want to hear aren’t what they NEED to hear?

**Read Jeremiah 29:10-14.**

How long did God say His people would live in Babylon? How might verse 10 have been devastating to those who heard these words? How might these words have seemed hopeful to others?

We are most likely familiar with verse 11. When we think of God’s plans for us, especially His plans to “prosper” us, do we tend to focus on our short term prosperity or on the long term?

Based on verse 10, are God’s prosperous plans for His people focused on the short term or the long term?

When does God say His people will find Him, according to verse 13? What does seeking God “with all of our hearts” look like?

Based on what we’ve read so far, what is God’s ultimate purpose in “carrying” His people into exile? How does this apply to us when we feel “lost in the desert”, or when God’s answers aren’t what we’d hoped?

Can you think of a time in your life when undesirable circumstances led you to seek God more deeply? What happened?

**Read 2 Chronicles 7:13-14.** God spoke these words to King Solomon after the dedication of the Temple, centuries before Jeremiah lived. How might these words have given comfort to those living in exile in Jeremiah's day?

How do these words give us comfort in our present circumstances?

Philippians 4:12 says, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." What does it mean to be "content" when you are facing circumstances you do not like?

Is it possible that God sometimes tells us "no" in order to teach us to be content? Have you experienced this in your life? How?

### **Closing Thoughts:**

Life doesn't always go the way we like. In both minor ways and sometimes, major ways, our plans go awry, and sometimes we find that for whatever reason, it is God's will that we go through the fire. That was certainly the case for those living in exile. But God was using this exile as a chance to recapture the hearts of His people. Their longing for home would bring them back to God in prayer, repentance, and a new commitment to serve Him only. He knew the plans He had for them. They were plans for long term prosperity. But sometimes, long term prosperity requires short term pain. So God's message was for His people to settle down, live life where they were, and trust that God's grace would carry them in their new home until the seventy years were completed for Babylon.

My sincere hope is that we don't have to wait "seventy years" for our life to get back to normal after this virus runs its course, (whatever normal looks like a few months from now.) But I do believe this can be a time when God molds us, as individuals, as a church, as a nation, and as a world. May we seek God with all of our heart, and may we trust that He can and will meet us when we are out of our routine, far from the way we used to live. God's grace will guide us! Trust in His plans!