

## Jeremiah Chapters 28-29 John Karmelich

1. When most of us hear the term "false prophets" we think that's one of those things talked about in a church service, but in reality it's not a thing we think much about. To paraphrase an expression I use a lot, "I've got enough on my plate then to think about false prophets". Yes these chapters do focus them. That of course leads to my lesson title: "The rise and fall of false prophets". Here we'll deal with a few of them who'll do their thing and essentially die before the end of these chapters. So yes, false prophets are a big topic here. Back to the important question: Why should we care?
  - a) To understand realize that the false prophets we read about here were Israelites. These "bad guys", were trained as priests. They invoking God's most holy name. They spoke falsely in God's Temple itself. Bottom line is they weren't shy about false predictions.
  - b) Yes they "get theirs" for doing this, but my point is just because someone is trained to be a pastor, is speaking in our church and even invoking God's name, doesn't mean the person speaking isn't a true spokesperson for God.
  - c) So the important thing is we need to learn to tell "the true from the false" as they'll be with us in our congregations. One of the final New Testament books (Jude) focuses on that. It's an issue all Christians have to be aware of as they're not afraid to be "amongst us" with an unwavering goal of driving us away from God and His will. Such people may not realize they are acting as a false prophet. They may be sincere, passionate and invoking the most holy name of God. None of that proves they are true to God's word.
  - d) If all of that doesn't scare you, realize Jesus Himself warns of false prophets. Luke 21:7-11 is a good place to read of such an example.
  - e) OK John, how do we know you're not a false prophet? Not because I say so. My desire is to teach the bible verse-by-verse in context. I will be judged based on how well I did that, so I ask that you judge me the same way. Compare what I teach to sound doctrine. Will I mess up? Of course, I'm not perfect. Still I pray before I write and ask God to guide me as to teach His word accurately. That's the standard for any bible teacher at any level.
  - f) That leads me back to the question, "I've got enough on my plate, why should I care about any of this stuff?" Because to live the Christian life means living as Jesus desires we live. I would argue we should care because it should be our desire to live as He desires. All that means is we need to be on our guard for what's right and wrong about how God wants us to live. That's the underlying message of these two chapters.
  - g) With that said, let me go over these two chapters. I should also say it's not 100% about the false prophets. There is some of Jeremiah's standard "obey God or suffer the consequences in these chapters, but they are wrapped around his condemnation of false prophets. With that said, it's time to discuss the chapters themselves.
2. Chapter 28 focuses on the story of a false prophet named Hananiah. He's from one of the cities in Israel that was designated for the priests, way back when Joshua was dividing up the land almost a thousand years earlier. Anyway, this guy was trained as a priest. He gave his prediction a little while after the first Babylonian invasion and effectively predicted, "Don't panic, God will bring to an end the Babylonians in two years and all the stuff he took will be returned."
  - a) That requires a quick background explanation for my newcomers. Israel was divided into two kingdoms at the time of King David's grandson several hundred earlier. The "North" one was conquered and scattered over 100 years prior to Jeremiah. The "South" stood at this time but was threatened by a large empire called the Babylonians based out of what is called Iraq today. Anyway around 600BC, Babylon invaded the "South Kingdom" on three occasions. On the first two, they did damage, took things and put people loyal to Babylon in charge. The third time, the Babylonians got tired of rebellion and wiped Israel "clean".
  - b) Anyway, this prediction happened after the first invasion. This false prophet stood in the temple of God, invoked His name and said in effect, "Don't worry, it'll be over in 2 years".

- c) Jeremiah who knew the truth had enough of this and confronted this guy in the Temple of God and the "showdown" occurred. Jeremiah had a wooden brace around his neck (yoke) as a sign of the Babylonians taking the Israelites captive. The false prophet broke the yoke off of Jeremiah's neck as a sign of what he thought God would do to the Babylonians.
  - d) Anyway Jeremiah came back, claimed that God will put an iron yoke on their necks. Then he predicted this false prophet would die in a few months as a sign of who's right! Yes that occurred and so much for that false prophet!
  - e) So does that mean we are to place curses on false prophets like that? No we should try to correct them in the sense God calls us to lead people to Him not away from Him. God has the eternal judging job as well as the job as deciding how long we will live, so no. Yes, I'm in favor of putting murderers to death, but that's a separate issue. The concern here is for those of us who are trying to draw close to God to not be lead by bad teachers.
3. That leads to Chapter 29. This takes place around the same time. At the time of that first invasion many Israelites were taken captive to Babylon, which included the king and even Daniel. Part of that invasion is the Israelites now had to pay tribute to the city/empire of Babylon. Along with it Jeremiah included a letter to the Israelites that were taken captive. I'd bet the Babylonians saw the letter and said in effect, "It's harmless, it includes surrender, so let's include it in the package".
- a) He starts off after mentioning who was taken (names the king and his family). Then he is encouraging the Israelites to "settle down, have families and be a blessing to those around them" in effect. It's the idea that "You're there, deal with it and be a witness for God while you're in that neighborhood".
  - b) Then Jeremiah states again the 70-year time frame. It's sort of amazing to consider a major empire like the Babylonians (uniting all the Middle East and "then some") would only last for exactly 70-years and die. I'm surprised that statement was allowed in the letter, but I speculate it was considered harmless prediction. Jeremiah wanted to prove to the captives that he was a prophet, and the captivity wouldn't be permanent.
  - c) Chapter 29 contains a verse often quoted by people who know their bible well. In essence it says that God has great plans for your future. In context, obviously it is discussing the nation of Israel and the fact God's not through with them. Out of context, many Christians will argue it also applies to our lives. It's a debated topic and I'll discuss that verse when I get to it in the details of this lesson.
  - d) Then Jeremiah gets back to dealing with false prophets. Yes they're among the Israelites in Babylon as they settled into that life there. Again keep in mind the main desire of demons to draw us away from God. No they can't take away our salvation, but they'll do all that's in their power to drive us away from God. Why? Because they don't want to have God as the center of their lives. The longer they can postpone judgment day the longer they'll rule over this world. So why don't they just try to kill as many as they can? Because the fear of death draws people to God so it works against their plan. Ever wonder why there were so many demons around Jesus to be cast out? Because they were working against Him.
  - e) That leads me back to the false prophets. They may sincerely think they're doing what the will of God is. They may sincerely think they're preaching in His name. They don't realize the powers who work against them. We're no match for Satan's power on our own. Only by trusting in Jesus can we overcome that sort of power, and that's an underlying message of this lesson as well! Anyway, those false prophets in Babylon were also preaching all of this will end soon, "so keep your bags packed as you're going home soon".
  - f) The chapter ends with Jeremiah naming by name the false prophets who were among all of the captives of Babylon and "singling them out". Something most of us are afraid to do today. With that said, hopefully you get the flavor of these two chapters at this point. So, let's start on the details. Again not to learn ancient history, but only so we can better learn how God wants to work in our lives to keep our eyes on the truth of His Word and avoid what is false in this world. OK then, time for the details.

4. Chapter 28, Verse 1: In the fifth month of that same year, the fourth year, early in the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, the prophet Hananiah son of Azzur, who was from Gibeon, said to me in the house of the LORD in the presence of the priests and all the people:
- a) Jeremiah goes out of his way to "time stamp" this verse. For those that care, it's 593BC. Do not forget that this was written down and organized into a book later in Jeremiah's life. I'd argue the reason for the time stamp is because 1) Jeremiah remembered it like "yesterday" even though it probably occurred a good while prior. 2) He wanted to include it in a part of his book (Chapters 26-29) that deal with life before the final invasion as if to say, here is what false prophets were saying at that time and here's what happened to them.
  - b) The underlying message here is "don't mess with God". Let's face it, anyone can say what they want "in God's name". Someone could be professionally trained as a priest, can go to a bible college, etc. But if they're trusting say in what a vision said when it contradicts the bible, that's when one is barking up the wrong tree! There are cults and religions all over the world based on what their leaders saw in a dream or vision. The way we validate the bible is because it's history written in advance. It's archeologically sound and manuscripts have been preserved in spite of tremendous human effort to destroy them. Let's just say, the bible has stood the test of time, versus what somebody "dreamed".
  - c) Let's be honest, false prophets can be dynamic, great speakers. They could spew off great things about our lives and the future. To correctly predict the future as a prophet of God one has to be 100% perfect at their predictions or not be considered legitimate. Personally I don't want those odds, so I don't go there.
  - d) All of that leads me back to this Hananiah character. To put it simply, he is not a prophet of God. The longer version is he was Jewish, came from one of the Israel cities given to the priests. I'm guessing he was dynamic and said what people wanted to hear.
5. Verse 2: "This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: `I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. <sup>3</sup> Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the LORD's house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon. <sup>4</sup> I will also bring back to this place Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other exiles from Judah who went to Babylon,' declares the LORD, `for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.' "
- a) Keep in mind the speaker of these verses is a false prophet. Jeremiah included it not to say "He got his punishment so don't speak against God". That's important but if that's all he's saying, Jeremiah could have just written, "False prophets said wrong things and they died for what they preached". Instead we get details of the false prophet's name, the fact he did invoke God's most holy name, is Jewish, probably was trained as priest, (based on where he's from) and if that's not enough, preached the opposite of what God wanted them to do as well as know. If all that isn't bad enough, this guy took the wooden yoke Jeremiah had around his neck and broke it. Let's just say this wasn't the high point of Jeremiah's life.
  - b) The important thing to grasp is a false prophet can have a Jewish background. He can also preach in God's name in the temple. Yes that means a false prophet can be preaching in our church as well. So how do we tell? Besides the obvious of comparing what he or she says to God's word, the good news of preaching in front a bunch of Christians is that one of the spiritual gifts God gives is the gift of "discernment".
  - c) Let's talk a little about their motivation. I'm sure in a lot of cases it's fame or fortune. For most of cases, I'm sure they sincerely believe they are preaching what God told them. It's a matter in their mind of getting out of their system, what they believed God said to them.
  - d) Another thing to state is false prophets often will state what we want to hear. Let's face it, it had to be a popular message in Israel to preach, "The Babylonians are going away. The stuff they took away is coming back". If you were an Israelite, you'd have to love hearing that message. The only way to know it was false was by time. Also by the fact Jeremiah's been preaching the truth about all the idols that existed in Israel at that time!

- e) What I'm getting at is despite the popularity of whatever someone around us can tell us about our lives or the future, it has to stand the truth of God's word. Paul himself told us that even if an angel preached something contrary to the bible, we should believe it. (That is based on Galatians 1:8.)
  - f) OK I'm preaching to the choir again. I'll stop pounding that point. You get the idea. Let's read Jeremiah's response to what this false prophet taught.
6. Verse 5: Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD. <sup>6</sup> He said, "Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the LORD's house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. <sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: <sup>8</sup> From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. <sup>9</sup> But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true."
- a) Jeremiah opened with "Amen". That word simply means, "I agree". Let's face it, Jeremiah would love to have peace just as the false teacher was preaching. Obviously he was being sarcastic. Jeremiah interrupts his "agreement speech" to say in effect, "Sorry Hananiah, I wish God will do that but the truth is that's not His will."
  - b) Then instead of saying, "It's my word against yours", Jeremiah gives him a history lesson. He says in effect, there were prophets in the past who preached horrible things as well as those who preached peace. The best way to tell who's right or wrong is through time!" It would be one thing to quote some verse from the bible to date to prove Jeremiah is right. A much easier and true thing to say is "Time will tell. Until then, let's all work to use our lives to make a difference for God and let Him deal with our future!"
  - c) Jeremiah's concern isn't that he's considered a greater person than Hananiah because he's a prophet of God. Jeremiah is concerned with the Israelites repenting before it's too late!
  - d) Anyway a line was now drawn in the sand saying in God's temple in front of the priestly dignitaries, "Hananiah preached this and I (Jeremiah) preach that! Let's teach the people to obey and follow God and see who wins!"
  - e) One way to tell a false prophet, is they can't stand competition as well see below:
7. Verse 10: Then the prophet Hananiah took the yoke off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah and broke it, <sup>11</sup> and he said before all the people, "This is what the LORD says: `In the same way will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon off the neck of all the nations within two years.' " At this, the prophet Jeremiah went on his way.
- a) If you recall from the last lesson, Jeremiah made a wooden yoke. It's essentially a bar that goes around the neck of an ox to pull it one way or the other. He tied it around his neck to say in effect, "The Babylonians are going to control our destiny, so accept it". Well it's now a good while since his original "yoke show" and he's still wearing that around his neck!
  - b) Anyway, Hananiah is ticked off that Jeremiah didn't believe him. I'd bet Hananiah is sure that God gave him that message and "how dare Jeremiah contradict him!" Therefore as to demonstrate his anger, he took the yoke that Jeremiah had on his neck and broke it.
  - c) I was trying to visualize how this happened. Was it violent? Did Hananiah put his arms around Jeremiah and untied the straps around his neck? I visualize Jeremiah being in so much shock at the moment, he just watched it happen.
  - d) Again, Hananiah claimed to be speaking for God and invoked His most holy name, which for my newcomers is written as "LORD". The name's often transliterated "Jehovah" but in fact we don't know how it's pronounced as vowels were points added later.
  - e) So after the shock of the event wore off, Jeremiah didn't want to argue with a man who is convinced God told him to do it, so he walked away. Could Jeremiah have argued more to others in the room? Yes, but he just preached on "time will tell who's right" so in effect there's nothing he could do besides walking away.

8. Verse 12: Shortly after the prophet Hananiah had broken the yoke off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: <sup>13</sup> "Go and tell Hananiah, 'This is what the LORD says: You have broken a wooden yoke, but in its place you will get a yoke of iron. <sup>14</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I will put an iron yoke on the necks of all these nations to make them serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they will serve him. I will even give him control over the wild animals.' "
- a) Obviously Jeremiah cared about the situation. He didn't want false prophets to get away with preaching in God's Name in God's house what is false. The good news is God loves to work in situations where we don't know what to do next. That's a good principal for us to keep in mind. When we're stuck and there's no logical thing to do next, God loves to be our guide for life. That's why it's essential to pray for His will and guidance to make what is the best decisions we can make given whatever information is in front of us.
  - b) With that said, time to discuss God's response to Jeremiah. God said in effect, "Hananiah broke this yoke made out of wood, but a "iron yoke " is coming. No, Jeremiah isn't going to wear an iron yoke. It's God's promise that what He's telling Jeremiah about all this bad stuff that's about to happen is so true and so bad it'll be like iron yokes on everyone's neck who's in the neighborhood! It's the statement that it isn't just the Israelites that are "going down for the count", but the other surrounding nations as well.
  - c) That leads to the question, if God was so ticked off at the Israelites for turning their backs on Him, why punish everyone else in site? Part of the reason's to show them that the God of the Israelites is the God of the world and because those nations knew that the Israelites claim "God is the only God" it's necessary to make that point. Another reason is that God is going to use Nebuchadnezzar to be His witness to the world that God's God. In Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar writes a letter to everyone in that empire that "God's God in effect". My point is God allowed the greater Middle East to be under the Babylonian control to show that greater world that "God's God" so deal with it!
  - d) I have to admit I'm fascinated by the fact that Jeremiah preached that Nebuchadnezzar is also going to have control over the wild animals. I don't think that's stated about anyone else in the bible (other than when the Messiah comes to rule over the world.) Obviously I don't see Nebuchadnezzar telling lions what to do. I see it as him having such authority in the world that the wild animals that exist will for the most part be "zoo'd up". It may be a reference to the idea that even wild animals can't stop that empire from spreading. Either way, such animals won't be an issue. Anyway, now that Jeremiah effectively understood what God's going to do, it's time to get back to dealing with the false prophet Hananiah.
9. Verse 15: Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, "Listen, Hananiah! The LORD has not sent you, yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies. <sup>16</sup> Therefore, this is what the LORD says: 'I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die, because you have preached rebellion against the LORD.' "
- a) I don't know if Hananiah was hanging around in the temple or Jeremiah just knew where to find him, but here we get confrontation #2 between Jeremiah and the false prophet!
  - b) Notice Jeremiah doesn't say, "Sorry buddy, you blew that one, later!" Instead Jeremiah is saying you spoke lies in God's most holy name, that's a death sentence! Jeremiah did not give an exact date of his death, but just stated it will be within a year.
  - c) That leads to the question, "Can we put false prophets to death or say horrible predictions about their future?" As to putting them to death, we don't live under biblical laws that do tell of putting false prophets to death. (See Deuteronomy 13:1-5 as an example). However we can't do that today, so all we can do is call them out say in front of our congregation. I would say the "Matthew 18; 15-17" rule applies here. That's where Jesus tells us to first tell a person "one on one". If they don't repent, repeat with a witness. If they still don't repent then tell the church. If they don't repent, we kick them out. A great mistakes most churches make is a failure to confront false teaching of what God's word is saying to us.

- d) But John, Jeremiah told this guy he's going to die before his two-year prediction will occur in Israel. Wouldn't it be better if he died say after those two years? That way he knew for sure he was wrong? Why have him die so quickly? Because God wanted us to see what's the penalty for speaking falsely in His name! So does that mean we can make predictions about others we think are preaching falsely. We can say whatever we want. It's His timing that's the issue here. Personally, I never want to put God to a test that way. The only way I ever want to put God to a test is to ask, I'm not sure what this bible passage means. That is when He works in our life to give us clarity. The only other way I know to test God is to give back a portion of what He gives us. God will be a debtor to no man, period! I'm not saying if we give say 10%, God must bless us ten times as much. I'm saying our heavenly rewards are based on our trust in Him with our lives and that includes finances.
- e) Anyway, this was bad news for Hananiah. To prove it, Verse 17:
10. Verse 17: In the seventh month of that same year, Hananiah the prophet died.
- a) We don't know how Hananiah died. I just know if I was him, I'd be scared what Jeremiah said and I'd use the remaining time of my life to do His will. The important point is this is done to establish Jeremiah as God's true prophet.
- b) OK then, time for Chapter 29.
11. Chapter 29, Verse 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. <sup>2</sup> (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) <sup>3</sup> He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon.
- a) Time for another "I'll forget this by tomorrow time stamp". The first Babylonian invasion was in 597BC. That's when the people listed in Verse 2 were taken away to Babylon. This was also described in 2nd Kings 24. This king only ruled for 3 months. He was only 18 at the time he ruled. The reason the queen mother's mentioned was because the king was so young when he was on the throne. Anyway, Jeremiah wrote this after both of them were taken into captivity and replaced by someone else who must be loyal to the Babylonians.
- b) The crux is this text is after the time of that event, Jeremiah was allowed to send a letter to the Israelites living in the Babylonian Empire. Since the prophet Ezekiel was sent to them, why did god want Jeremiah to send this letter too? Could be to verify that Jeremiah was a prophet to those in captivity? Also, Daniel was among those taken captive. This letter will mention the 70-years of captivity that Daniel himself refers to. Could it be that Daniel saw this letter and that's what he was referring to in Daniel 9, Verse 2? Could be. Daniel calls Jeremiah a prophet so even if Daniel didn't get Jeremiah's whole book, he considered him to be a prophet for what that's worth.
- c) You might recall in the last lesson I mentioned the fact that after the first invasion not only was the king and "royal court" taken but also some of the "craftsmen and artisans" were in that crowd. The point is Nebuchadnezzar didn't want to "waste good" so the ones with a gift or talent were taken to be used in that Empire as opposed to be put to death.
- d) I don't know if the letter was taken secretly or just taken as part of the official documents. Keep in mind that since Israel was now subject to Babylon, I'm sure they had to pay taxes every year to them. Maybe it just went as part of the official correspondence. Again none of us know for sure. All we know is the letter "made it" and it made Jeremiah's book!
- e) Jeremiah included his thanks to the people transporting the letter just as Paul often gave a little credit in his letters to the "transporters" of it. It's part of the reminder that it's not the size of our ministry that counts, but our loyalty to what God calls us to do!

- f) Coming back to the "time stamp" this letter was during the reign of Zedekiah. He was the last of the Israelite kings. Because he's still there, this had to be before the final invasion to "level" the place, but probably not long before then. OK then, time for the letter's context"
12. Verse 3 (cont.) It said: <sup>4</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup> "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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."
- a) Here's the key point of Jeremiah's letter. His message to his fellow Israelites who already have been taken into captivity, "Relax, settle down, you're going to be there a while. Be a good witness to your non-believing neighbors and pray for prosperity in your town.
- b) It is not a call to "intermarry" with the locals. He still wanted the Israelites to be Israelites in that land. It's what we Christians call, "Be in the world but not of the world". God still wants us to have children, increase in numbers and again be a witness for Him.
- c) To seek the peace and prosperity means to "set up shop" (i.e., work there) and pray for all to go well there. One of the fascinating things about the Israelites after that captivity is it changed them from "farmers to business owners" as a primary source of income.
13. Verse 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. <sup>9</sup> They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the LORD.
- a) Meanwhile, back to the false prophets. Remember we're still reading Jeremiah's letter that he dictated to the Israelites in captivity. Essentially he's saying, "Watch out for those false prophets who are among you". First, let me talk about why they're there and then I'll tell us how we can spot them.
- b) Remember the basic purpose of demons. They want to draw people away from God. It's because they know that they'll rule on earth until whenever Jesus "sets up shop". They do all they can to discourage people from committing their lives to Jesus (or just draw closer to God in this case). As I stated Satan knows His bible well. He's aware that the Messiah (Jesus) can't "set up shop" in Israel if there is no Israel standing. Therefore, false prophets will be used by demons to discourage people to want to return to Israel. That's why only a small percentage of the Israelites did return. It's also amazing to consider that Satan is very aware that no one but God the father knows the "magic number" of believers before He says, "OK Jesus it's time". Therefore every time someone gets saved, Satan as well as the demons realize they're now one person closer to the "magic number". How do I know all of this? Easy, Heaven won't have an infinite number of people, but a finite number. It means there has to be a "last one", so everyone who gets saved gets us closer to that event.
- i) A quick theological side discussion: If demons know they'll lose in the end, why is it they bother? Best possibility is because they want to be in charge and don't care for the fact that God chose humans and not angels to be the center of his salvation plan. So the rebellion happened and continued to this day. Demons do all they'll can do to draw people away from God. We're no match for them. It's only as we trust in His power that we can overcome such forces. OK then, back to the text.
- c) Jeremiah realized there were false prophets among in the Babylonian territory. We'll get a few by name later in this chapter. I suspect Jeremiah also understood enough theology to realize that demons and false prophets are "part of God's plan" as the only way to fight all of that false power is to trust in Him as His power is greater than their power, period.
- d) Now that we know "they're out there", how do we spot them? Jesus said we'd recognize them by "their fruit" (Matthew 7:16-20). That simply means if we know our bible we will be able to recognize false messages simply by what they preach and its counter to what is said in the bible. That's why discernment in the church is necessary for healthy believers!

- e) All of that theology takes us back to the literal aspect of what Jeremiah is preaching. He is saying that "diviners" (think of them as false prophets with "props") as well as people who claim they had a dream that God wanted them to do x and y. At the least, Jeremiah said it would be a long captivity (70 years), so if false prophets were saying, "pack your things as you'll be coming home soon", you'll know they are false prophets.
  - f) Suppose you're the "average Israelite" taken into captivity. You've got Jeremiah saying it'll be 70 years and a false prophet saying, "Pack your bags, it's go time". Obviously we'd like to believe the "Pack your bag" person as we all want good news. Why should the Israelites trust Jeremiah as they don't know the future? For starters he predicted the first invasion to a "tee", so his track record was good to date. Second Daniel and Ezekiel were among those taken in the first captivity, so other true prophets were "on the scene". The point is if we're in doubt, let time show us who's the true prophets of God. In the meantime, all we can do is make the best decisions we can under the guide of His word given what's in front of us.
14. Verse 10: This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.
- a) Here's the big promise of "The Israelites will be back in 70 years". A quick history lesson if you don't know the story. Secular history records that the Medo-Persian army conquered the city of Babylon without a battle. The short version is they dammed up the water source that flowed around and into the city then snuck under the gate when the water was low.
  - b) When the Persians were in power, among the decrees they made (Ezra Chapter 1:1-4) that the Israelites can return home. It was exactly 70 years (using a Jewish 360 day calendar) to the day from when the first invasion of the Israelites took place.
  - c) Grant it only a small number of Israelites did return after the 70 years. Most of them were now comfortable in the Babylonian, that became the Medo-Persian Empire. Even to today, there's the "Persian Jews" referring to the Jewish people who came out of that empire. One of the interesting things is the Babylonians let them take all the "family records" when the final captivity happened. That's how the Gospel traced Jesus ancestry back to King David.
  - d) Another strange that that fascinated me is why did the Babylonians allow that part of the letter to be sent? Maybe they didn't know or care. Maybe they just figured, that's strange, let's all see what happens that far down the road. At least he's encouraging them to settle down and not rebel against us (Babylonians) so they allowed it.
15. Verse 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. <sup>12</sup> Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. <sup>13</sup> You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup> 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."
- a) Now we come to the "significant verses". Many Christians have quoted these in times of a bad situation saying "God's got great plans for your future". I've always liked the idea that when I read a bible verse, I read "20 verses before and after" to see it in context. Obviously in context it refers to His plan to return the Israelites to the land and be His people united under the rule of the Messiah. Notice in Verse 14 it reads, "from all the nations and places where I have banished you". Speaking of bible rules, another one is that prophesy is often in "patterns". The point is the short-term fulfillment is the 70 years. The long term one is a reference to the idea that when the Messiah comes (i.e., Jesus Second Coming), the Israelites will return there from many countries, maybe including the United States in that day. But are Jewish people "banished" here? I don't know, such is the debate. However, I would say the Jewish population in Russia who returned there over the last half century is an example of "places where they are banished".
  - b) That leads to the important question, can we read these verses out of context? When life's going badly, can we say, "I know the plans I (God) have for you?"



- i) My first thought is what about the devout Christians dying of cancer? There never is a guarantee of how long we'll live in life. Yes I've seen people suffer from horrid things and then recover to have a great life. These verses don't ever mean we are guaranteed long and healthy lives as Christians. I would argue we can apply them to our eternal security no matter what happens in this lifetime.
  - ii) So is it ok for Christians to quote these verses out of context? Sure, but it's never a guarantee to a great life after whatever tragedy. It is a guarantee our eternity is set as long as we're trusting in Jesus being God, dying for all our sins and being the Lord of our lives. So how's that for a safe answer.
  - iii) OK then, time to move on.
16. Verse 15: You may say, "The LORD has raised up prophets for us in Babylon,"<sup>16</sup> but this is what the LORD says about the king who sits on David's throne and all the people who remain in this city, your countrymen who did not go with you into exile--<sup>17</sup> yes, this is what the LORD Almighty says: "I will send the sword, famine and plague against them and I will make them like poor figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten.<sup>18</sup> I will pursue them with the sword, famine and plague and will make them abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth and an object of cursing and horror, of scorn and reproach, among all the nations where I drive them.<sup>19</sup> For they have not listened to my words," declares the LORD, "words that I sent to them again and again by my servants the prophets. And you exiles have not listened either," declares the LORD.
- a) The first thing to keep in mind about these verses is they're talking about Israelites who're still living in Israel. Let me paraphrase, "Verse 15 says in effect, "We got false prophets in Babylon here who say we're all coming home soon." My (God's response) is the Israelites "still living here will die from the sword (killed by the Babylonian army) famine (as they will starve out the cities they want to conquer) and plague (disease that comes with a lack of clean water)." Bottom line is Jeremiah is preaching what he's been saying for decades, it is just a matter of time before the final Babylonian invasion that will wipe out this place.
  - b) In a sense, Jeremiah is telling the Israelites already in captivity, "You're the lucky ones." If you're still in Israel you'll die from either sword, plague or famine".
  - c) The other thing to realize is Jeremiah wasn't alone in preaching this. Other prophets (what we call "The Minor Prophets") included some who preached this as well.
  - d) God gave signs to the prophets to validate them as prophets with actual destruction of the temple and what remained of the Israelites there as proof that they were the true prophets.
  - e) All of this leads back to the issue of why did God allow this in the first place? Because the nation of Israel (ok, the nation of Judah to be technical) collectively turned from God so it is time for God to say in effect "I've had enough". The reason this event is such a big deal in the bible is it's a reminder of what can happen to believers when we waste the gifts He has given us to be a witness for Him. However, I'm preaching "old ground" here for those of you who've been reading my Jeremiah lessons to date.
  - f) Keep in mind the letter isn't addressed to the Israelites "still there" but those already taken into captivity. The underlying point is despite all of this upcoming disaster, settle down in that land because seventy years later Israel will be a "nation again" albeit part of the Medo Persian Empire. They weren't an independent country again until 1948 other than a brief time when they successfully rebelled against the Greek based empire.
  - g) Again the important point here is despite what the false prophets are preaching, God isn't through with Israel but the future of that nation works on His timing not ours.
  - h) One final thing, notice the prediction is for "everyone" still in Israel. The king and those in charge are singled out. The idea is the leaders still there won't be able to protect them. We are watching God's will come down. For those who put their trust in human government and don't believe God "behind the scenes pulling the strings" that's why God sent the prophets to state what's going on. So if all of this is true, why didn't God stop say 9-11 or even the World Wars? The answer has to do with free will, but He still wants to guide us.

17. Verse 20: Therefore, hear the word of the LORD, all you exiles whom I have sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon. <sup>21</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says about Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying lies to you in my name: "I will hand them over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will put them to death before your very eyes. <sup>22</sup> Because of them, all the exiles from Judah who are in Babylon will use this curse: 'The LORD treat you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon burned in the fire.' <sup>23</sup> For they have done outrageous things in Israel; they have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives and in my name have spoken lies, which I did not tell them to do. I know it and am a witness to it," declares the LORD.
- a) Time to return to the false prophets. Two are named by name. Ahab and Zedekiah. Both of those names are fairly common in the Old Testament. An Israelite king who lived about two hundred years earlier named Ahab (bad news by the way) and there was a bunch of Zedekiah's in the bible. Bottom line, these two guys were bad news and got singled out as they preached against God's will for the Israelites. As to their fate, Verse 21 tells us that Nebuchadnezzar put them to death in front of the Israelites. Why would he do that? Let's face it, if these two guys were preaching the captivity would be short and they'd all return to Israel soon, I could see Nebuchadnezzar making an example out of them.
  - b) Notice the verses mention that their death was so gruesome, (burned alive) so their death became a curse in the Babylonian empire among the Israelites. It's sort of "Don't mess with Nebuchadnezzar type of curse".
  - c) OK we get that these are "bad dudes" who made predictions that weren't God ordained. It also says they committed adultery and spoke lies. Is the adultery reference literal? Could be, no way to prove it. Either way they violated the 10 commandments not only by the act of adultery but also by telling lies (speaking evil in God's name). It's one of those proofs of the idea that God knows all things. Maybe their adultery was well known in Israel. That's one of those things to "Keep us on our toes" and remind us that we're all accountable. We may not be thrown in a fire in this lifetime, but there's an eternal one that's much worse!
  - d) So if the Israelites in general for turning their backs on God, why were the false prophets singled out as being worse? It comes back to the idea that those who teach God's word or even preach in His name are held to a higher standard. (See James 3:1.) Yes that makes me nervous as a bible teacher and makes me strive to teach it this correctly. Anyway, those in the land of Israel at that time who got taken into captivity were the "lucky ones" but at the same time God's still watching over them and stopping those who are bad witnesses who are preaching falsely in His name.
  - e) So does this mean we don't have to worry about the false teachers as God will "weed them out" so to speak? Hardly. God gives us His word to give us discernment as what is true in terms of how He wants us to live. Living in the era of the internet it's easier to compare a concept of what can and can't be true as far as His will. That just means we have less of an excuse before God today, as too much information is available at our fingertips.
18. Verse 24: Tell Shemaiah the Nehelamite, <sup>25</sup> "This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: You sent letters in your own name to all the people in Jerusalem, to Zephaniah son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the other priests. You said to Zephaniah, <sup>26</sup> 'The LORD has appointed you priest in place of Jehoiada to be in charge of the house of the LORD; you should put any madman who acts like a prophet into the stocks and neck-irons. <sup>27</sup> So why have you not reprimanded Jeremiah from Anathoth, who poses as a prophet among you? <sup>28</sup> He has sent this message to us in Babylon: It will be a long time. Therefore build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.' "
- a) Here's where Jeremiah gets personal. He said in effect, "Previous letters were sent back to Jerusalem in effect to have Jeremiah arrested for preaching that the captivity will go on for a long time." The letter was sent to the high priest to say in effect, "How come Jeremiah is still preaching away and why aren't you treating him like a madman?"

- b) So one can see, we're dealing with another false prophet claiming, "Jeremiah's the bad guy here, why aren't you stopping him". Again, think what I wrote earlier in this lesson all about how the goal of demons is to draw us away from God. Notice the false prophets are not afraid to "get their hands dirty" and have God's true prophets put in the stockade.
  - c) Some commentators believe this is a second letter here because it makes reference to what Jeremiah stated earlier about "settle down there and build houses there". The main point's simply the fact that the false prophets are working to discourage the Israelites from doing what God wanted them to do there, "settle down for a 70 year period there". The message is in effect, "Go arrest Jeremiah and make him publicly suffer for preaching that message.
  - d) Ok we got Jeremiah preaching God's will and the false prophets saying, "It'll be over soon so everybody keep your bags packed" so to speak. How were those Israelites supposed to know who to believe? First, Jeremiah had the "better track record to date" as Babylon has already completed the first captivity and has wiped out places that refused to submit. So I am sure the Babylonian threat wouldn't be taken lightly. Second the Israelites could say, I know this is God's land and He's testing us here, so we should be ready to move back! It's a matter of who do you trust? What is God's word or what "sounds like the most pleasant of the choices"? That's the point here.
19. Verse 29: Zephaniah the priest, however, read the letter to Jeremiah the prophet.<sup>30</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah:<sup>31</sup> "Send this message to all the exiles: 'This is what the LORD says about Shemaiah the Nehelamite: Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, even though I did not send him, and has led you to believe a lie,<sup>32</sup> this is what the LORD says: I will surely punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his descendants. He will have no one left among this people, nor will he see the good things I will do for my people, declares the LORD, because he has preached rebellion against me.' "
- a) This chapter ends with more punishment proclaimed against another false prophet. This one is named Shemaiah the Nehelamite: There's no cross reference to him so all we know of him is in these verses. Not only will he be punished for falsely preaching in God's name but his descendants as well. I suspect that means he had sons who joined "Dad's cause".
  - b) What about the biblical principal that the children are not punished for the parents sins? (See Ezekiel 18:20 as an example.) However children often suffer due to parent's sins. The obvious example is alcoholics and families who suffer due to that sin. My point is if God's making this man's descendants suffer for his sins, I'll trust in God's eternal judgment as to what's fair for each individual.
  - c) Without getting too repetitive, the main point here is we get another false prophet and the punishment announced for what he preached. If you've been reading my lessons to date, you get the idea that Jeremiah suffered a lot for what he preached and we'll read of more as we get through the rest of the book. The good news is the next few chapters switch to a more positive topic, but I'll save that concept for the next lesson.
20. The main point of this lesson is that as Christians we must be on the watch for false teachers as it is a goal of demons to make us ineffective witnesses for Jesus. Consider when one reads through the Gospels, Jesus spent a lot of time casting out demons. My point is demons were not afraid to be in the same neighborhood as Jesus so they could do damage. Therefore I doubt they're afraid to be among believers as well. Obviously false prophets don't wear shirts saying, "Yes I'm one of those false prophets, follow me!" The only way to discern is to study His word so we can realize when one is speaking falsely. If you get that, you get the lesson. OK then, time for prayer:
21. Heavenly Father, First we are grateful that You have separated us to do Your will. As we use our lives to make a difference for You. As we do that, give us discernment to recognize what is false teaching versus true teaching. Make it obvious to us the path that You desire for our lives as we use our lives for Your glory. Through your Spirit give us discernment as to what is false around us so we can better do Your will for our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen