

# **THE PLAN: HOPE, JUSTICE AND LOVE**

First Presbyterian Church

Kingwood

By Stephen M. Sesí (PhD)

# INTRODUCTION

- There are at least 25 million refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the world today
- 17 million people were displaced by conflicts that have erupted since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- Refugees and IDPs do not have access to jobs or land for farming, they rely on charity

# I. THE SCENARIO

- Jews from Judea had just been conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and many of them carried away to exile—Refugees in Babylon
- In addition to carrying people to exile Nebuchadnezzar had cleaned the Temple and carried the precious golden utensils and articles to his country—Babylon.
- The King Zedekiah pleaded with God but his plea was rejected

# A. THE WARNING!

- Israelites had been warned about the captivity by many prophets including, Isaiah, Micah, Joel, Amos, Habakkuk, Zephaniah and finally Jeremiah. “Again and again I sent my servants the prophets, who said, do not do this detestable thing that I hate” (Jer. 44:4).
- Among these prophets Isaiah and Micah were very persistent and continued to preach throughout the country during the terms of the following kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah all kings of Judah—**AT LEAST 65 YEARS!**

## B. THE SPECIAL CALL OF JEREMIAH

- God decided as one final attempt to bring his people to repentance, He should select a special prophet—selected at conception, called in childhood:
- “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” (Jer. 1:5)

## C. THE SPECIAL MISSION OF JEREMIAH

- “The LORD reached out His hand and touched my mouth and said to me, now I have put my words in your mouth. See today I appoint you over nations, and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jer. 1:9-10)
- That was a daunting task for the young lad, Jeremiah. But he could not back out of it.

# D. THE EVANGELIST TO STUBBORN PEOPLE (Jer. 11:6-8)

- Jeremiah was sent to preach to all the towns of Judah (Jer. 11:6a)
- Jeremiah was sent to preach to all the streets of Jerusalem (Jer. 11:6b)
- “But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubbornness of their evil hearts.” (Jer. 11:8)
- “We will certainly do everything we said we would: We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour our drink offering to her as we and our fathers, our kings and our officials did in the **towns of Judah** and in the **streets of Jerusalem**” (Jer. 44:17).

# E. THE DECEPTION

- Prophet Hananiah lied to the people in the following ways (Jer. 28:1-4):
  - The yoke of the king of Babylon will be broken in two years
  - Within two years all articles of the House of Yahweh carried by king Nebuchadnezzar will be brought back to Jerusalem
  - Within two years Jehoiachin (the king of Judah) will be brought back
  - Within two years all the exiles who went to Babylon from Judah will be brought back to Judea

## II. THE PLAN

- Build Houses and settle down
- Plant gardens and eat produce
- Marry and have sons and daughters
- Find wives for sons and husbands for daughters
  - Increase in number there
  - Do not decrease
- Seek peace and prosperity of the city
  - Pray to the LORD for it
    - City's prosperity leads to your prosperity

## A: HOPE (JER. 29:10-14)

- The captivity was going to take seventy years
- The time in exile will not be two years as prophet Hananiah had promised, it will take a life time cf. Psalm 90:10 “The length of our days is seventy years or eighty if we have the strength;”
- God will take notice of his people; God will pay heed to his people

# 1. The Exile was within God's Eternal Scheme of Things

- God has been thinking about Israel and has a plan to save the Israelites. Going to exile was a plan of salvation
- Though seventy years are long, do not think I have forgotten, says God. Even this exile is within God's. "For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD. They are plans for good not for disaster to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11).

## 2. Exile was designed to accomplish salvation for Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians

- Nebuchadnezzar needed to acknowledge this and it could not happen without the messengers from Israel particularly Daniel. After Nebuchadnezzar was driven to the wild for seven seasons he came back to his senses and said “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (Dan. 4:37).

### 3. Exile was designed to lead to Repentance on the part of Israel

- When God visits them in exile and sets them free, they are to respond in **repentance** and pray to Him, Seek Him. Yahweh is not sitting in heaven waiting for to find our way up there; no He comes to us first and we are to respond to His presence through prayer and devotion. In the past they worshipped Baal and other idols, now after the discipline they will need to devote their worship to Yahweh alone. They must give up their idolatry to seek the Yahweh with all their hearts.

## B: JUSTICE (JER. 30:10-11)

- Justice is about salvation—God declared that He would surely save Israel
- The Good News that Yahweh will bring salvation, peace, freedom, and permanence
- God would bring peace commonly encompassed in the concept of *Shalom*—*wholeness, perfection, abundance*.
- This picture of peace and security is that of sheep lying undisturbed in their pastures

# 1. Yahweh's Presence will never depart from within sight of His people

- *I am with you*—Yahweh repeats the promise that He will save Israel—a central motif in the Old Testament: no matter how grave their sins they have hope of being saved and gathered back in the fold.
- Jesus looked at Jerusalem and said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Matt. 23:37).

## 2. Yahweh Vowed to Preserve Israel: “I Will not Completely Destroy You”

- Israel as a nation would be preserved throughout history as a testimony of God’s faithfulness of keeping His promises. A number of nations since the time of Jeremiah tried to exterminate the Israelites in history but failed:
  - *Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite the enemy of the Jews tried to annihilate the Jews in the Persian kingdom (which stretched from India to Cush)*
  - *Emperor Titus of the Roman Empire in AD 70 tried to destroy the Jews completely and later the Roman empire removed all the Jews from Palestine*
  - *Hitler during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War tried to annihilate all the Jews in Europe*
- Each time God protected the Jews from being exterminated

### 3. Exile was to uphold Justice and bring Discipline to the People of God

- Yahweh does not accept *impunity* and those who sin against Him he disciplines. The Jews went through a discipline when they were taken to captivity and Justice was upheld.
  - Retributive Justice—God punishes the oppressor therefore Babylon will not go unpunished
  - Distributive Justice—God saves the oppressed from the suffering and restores them to *shalom*, therefore Israel will be gathered back in Palestine

# C: LOVE (JER. 31:1-5)

- Yahweh loves all the clans or families of Israel
- The word here is used as an emphasis analogy to encompass the entire nation without any family or tribe of Israel missed. God loves each and every one of them.
- Desert is a figure referring to land of exile and suffering as opposed to homeland. Those who are in exile will also be shown mercy. God's grace and favour is not limited to comfort zones. God's mercies will be displayed in exile as much as in their homeland

# 1. God Loves Israel Forever

- Israel will be given rest. The LORD in his infinite grace is concerned about finding rest for his troubled, weary people
- I have loved you with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3).
- Charity—Love which is based on the good will of the lover and seeks to benefit the object of love without seeking reciprocity. The love which is entirely based on the choice of the lover not the behaviour of the beloved. While the beloved is expected to respond in trusting and believing the lover, the love relationship is based on the choice of the Subject.

## 2. God draws people to Himself with Love

- In many religions people are coerced to believe and kept in by fear
- With Yahweh, He draws people to Himself through Love—John 3:16
- God stretches His loving hand to Israel to repent and make Him their God.
- God promised to rebuild Israel again—it happened through Nehemiah

# APPLICATION

- God's purpose was to discipline Israel for their misconduct
- In addition God's purpose included salvation for the Babylonians who were heathen.
- God's instructions for you is to seek Him with all your heart no matter what the circumstances
- God wants you to follow His will no matter where you are—you are not exempt from obedience because you are away from your pastor (Dan.1:8).

# ACTION

- Purpose in your heart obey God wherever you are/go.
- Purpose in your heart to pray for your city, for your state, for your country because its prosperity is your prosperity
- Purpose in your heart to reach out to the refugees in your city. Treat them with kindness and be generous to them.
- If you are a refugee/newcomer, become a Texan, pray for Houston and Texas and America.