

# Jeremiah's Letter to the Exiles

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn back to Jeremiah chapter 29. Verse 10, For thus says the Lord, When seventy years are completed, for Babylon, it's the seventy years of captivity, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. That word, plans for wholeness, the word wholeness can be translated in different ways.

It might be in your Bible, welfare, or it might be peace. All these words come from the root, which the root really does mean wholeness. But I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Now this prophet, Jeremiah, had one of the hardest jobs, the hardest work, or the hardest calling, because prophecy, it wasn't a job, it was a way of life.

But it was certainly one of the hardest that any person was called to, because Jeremiah had to give a message that people didn't want to hear.

[ 1 : 24 ] And people completely misunderstood Jeremiah's motives. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet, because the message that he had to give was a message of coming destruction, of God going to come in judgment on his people, and going to uproot them out of the land of promise, that the unthinkable was going to happen.

Because God's people never for one moment thought that it would be possible for them to be taken out of the land of promise. But God had always said to them that their future in that land was in many ways dependent upon themselves.

His good to them ultimately in the long term would be dependent on himself. But their remaining in the land was going to be dependent upon themselves.

And he always said to them that if they continued down a road of idolatry, of turning their back upon him, and embracing all the ways of different cultures, that he would visit them with judgment.

And that he would uproot them from the land. Of course, they never thought that was possible. So Jeremiah, his message, he was living at that time when that judgment was coming ever closer.

[ 2 : 51 ] Very, very difficult. And this is what made things doubly difficult for Jeremiah. Is that there was no person who was more patriotic to the land, and to the nation, and to the people, than Jeremiah.

Jeremiah, he loved passionately the people. He loved the land. But the people thought he was a traitor because he was speaking by a way of saying that they were going to be destroyed, that the Babylonians were going to come and take them away captive.

And so Jeremiah, sometimes he barely escaped with his life. He was thrown into a pit. He was thrown into the prison, into this dungeon of myrrh. Myrrh. He had a fearful time.

And yet he remained faithful to God all the time, giving the message. And that's why he was the weeping prophet, because when you think about it, it was an incredibly difficult role he was given, an incredibly difficult calling.

To be faithful to God, with God's word, and everybody calling him a traitor when there was nobody who was in fact doing more to protect the nation.

[ 4 : 03 ] And Jeremiah would just say, listen to my word. If you repent, if you turn, if you turn from your idolatry, if you turn back to God, you can still save yourselves from this coming disaster.

But they wouldn't listen. Now, of course, when you go through Jeremiah, it can sometimes be quite hard reading, because there is so much in the way of judgment. But as is always the case, it's not all judgment.

And even in some of the most difficult parts of God's word, you will find that there are also beautiful promises. And that God, when he deals with his people, and when he deals in a hard way, it's not forever.

It is in order to restore. God never deals with his people in order to make an end of them. He deals with them with a purpose of bringing them back. And that's what he was going to do.

Because although he was going to uproot them from the land, it wasn't forever. It was for a period. It was for a time. And in fact, the Lord said, because others were giving another message, and his message was, look, you're in Babylon, and you're going to be there for 70 years.

[ 5 : 13 ] And he wanted them, while they were there, to settle down, and to marry, and to seek the welfare and the peace of the place they were. And that the Lord would bless them where they were.

But he was working in them in order to bring them back and to restore them. And we know that that's what happened. Now, of course, when the Lord withholds his blessing, he does so for differing reasons.

Sometimes it's to teach us things, to make discoveries of ourselves. But very often, when God withholds his blessing, and we've always got to remember this, when God is dealing in judgment, we've always got to remember that his judgment begins with his people.

It begins in the church. Judgment begins in the house of God. We're told that. And that's a very serious thing because God's word shows us that the prosperity or the blessing nationally of a place is largely dependent.

And when I say the church, I mean it in its broadest sense, in the Christian church. It's dependent upon the people of God. In the very same way, as the Lord said, when things go wrong, and when a nation is going into a mess, the Lord says, if my people who are called by my name if they will turn from their wicked ways, if they will repent, and they will seek my faith, the Lord promises to heal the land.

[ 6 : 51 ] So you see, there is an incredible responsibility placed upon the church. And whenever we see things, and it's all very well pointing the finger at politicians and pointing your finger here and there, the rot always begins in the church.

And God's judgment begins in the church. And we've always got to, that's what the scripture tells us. And so it's vital that people who will declare themselves to be people of the church, if they are going wrong, then the Lord begins to withhold his blessing.

And the more the Lord withholds his blessing, the more that lack of blessing spreads out nationally. So we've always got to remember, when we look at the situation and conditions in our own land today, we've always got to say, right, and we're taking the church at its broadest term, where is the church?

Because it is a vital part in the well-being, or otherwise, of the nation. And God will often withhold his blessing in the way that you just study the history of Israel.

When sin was part and partial of the life, they couldn't prosper until it was dealt with. If God sees that his people are placing all their efforts in their own wisdom, in their own understanding, and not seeking his face, he will withhold the blessing.

[ 8 : 22 ] When God sees strife and his people at arguing with one another, he will withhold his blessing. There's so many, so many different things. But, what we've always got to remember is at the end of the day, God is seeking the well-being.

That's, God wants the well-being. And we're told in the Scripture that judgment is a strange work, but that mercy is his delight.

We mustn't forget that. And he's not willing that any should perish. That's what the Word of God says to us. However, what we've got to remember is that the Lord has to be true to himself.

And the Lord cannot exalt his church when his church are living in disobedience to his name.

Because if he does exalt his church when they are living in defiance and disobedience to his name, it would point that he is condoning how they live and what they're doing.

And so, we see here that in this time, the church, the people of God, they had church. This was the strange thing about Israel and Judah.

[ 9 : 38 ] Remember how Israel and Judah divided? That there was rarely a point where they never, ever, ever had any worship of God. They tended to mix the two, idolatry and worship of God.

But when you mix idolatry with worship of God, it becomes a mockery in the sense of God. God hates that. So that they were trying to marry the ways of the world and the ways of the other nations

along with, and it was kind of a token worship of God because they said, after all, we are God's people so we'll have to give something to God but they were giving, they were going a hundred miles away in the other direction.

However, with regard to the judgment and the captivity and the exile and all these things, God has said to them, look, it's only for a time. And then he says to them, look, I will visit you.

After 70 years, he said, I will visit you and I will fulfill my promise to you and bring you back to this place. And then these wonderful words, it must have been music to the years of the exiles.

For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil to give you a future and a hope.

[10:57] I know the plans that I have for you. That must have been wonderful for the people of God to hear because the first thing that it shows us here is that God is thinking of his people.

If God has plans for them, it means that he's thinking of them. And they probably felt away there and far away in Babylon that God had forgotten all about them.

They had seen the unthinkable happen. They never believed that that beautiful, magnificent, one of the most beautiful wonders anywhere, the magnificence of Solomon's temple.

It was their pride and joy. It was the focus of everything. It was the place where God's presence was. They didn't believe that that could ever be brought down to rubble.

But that's exactly what happened. And they saw the walls of that great city, Jerusalem, reduced to rubble. They couldn't believe what they were seeing.

[12:01] And of course, many were killed. And they're taken, those who survived were taken, or many of those who survived, were taken away to a foreign land. And it would be very easy for them to think, God has forgotten all about us.

We are the abandoned people. But here is a message from God saying, no, you're not abandoned. I haven't forgotten about you. I have plans for you.

And that shows, if you have a plan for anybody or anything, that you're thinking about that person. And so this is what the Lord is saying to them.

That he's thinking about them. But you'll notice that the plans that he has are good plans. You see, you could have plans. You could have plans for somebody or something, and they're not very good. But God is saying, look, I have plans for you. And they're good. I am actually, and you know, it also shows us that when, or highlights here, if God has a plan, it means that you're not an afterthought.

[13:06] It's not, God doesn't go along making up a sort of an agenda for your life as it goes along. And that he changes things according to the arrival of new circumstances that he didn't know about.

God is never taken by surprise. Now that might be hard for us to understand and sometimes hard for us to equate with what we think of God.

But God, in a sovereign way, knows the beginning from the end and permits things and allows things that to us don't make sense, things that hurt us and go like a knife into our heart.

But God is still saying, I have plans for you and they're good. Even although right now you can only see a very limited picture. Right now your heart is broken, you're grieving and you're saying to yourself, well, has God forgotten about me or what kind of plans does he have for me when this is the way life is going for me?

But God is saying, I have good, my plans for you are good. They're good. And we've always got to take that so we've got to remember that God doesn't work in the way that we work.

[14:26] We often make, we have knee-jerk reactions to things. We have a plan one week and then we change our mind and it's a different plan the next week because circumstances change.

We have to alter what we plan to do because things change. That never works like that with God. He knows the end from the beginning. His ways are mysterious.

His thoughts are not our thoughts and his ways are certainly not our ways. So this would have been a great encouragement to the people in Babylon who were, I'm sure many of them thought that they were simply distant memories in the mind of God.

God is showing they are definite, they are specific plans. And it's plans, he says, for I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil.

Now, this word, as we said, this word wholeness here, it's translated in so many different ways and the actual meaning of the, behind, or the root meaning does mean wholeness.

[15:34] But it's the word that we, there's different derivations of it and we have welfare, it might be translated as welfare, it can be translated in some as peace because that is part of the meaning of

it.

So we've got, we've got to remember that, that it's, that this is what the Lord is saying, that my thoughts, my plans for you, they are plans of wholeness, of welfare, of peace.

And the reason why this is often translated as peace, I suppose we get the word peace from the actual word that is here because it is one of the greatest theological words in the Bible.

It's at the very center of everything that we are as Christians because peace is at the very center of who God is in himself. You see, the Lord is at peace with himself.

That's one of the things that distinguishes the Lord from, from us. We are distinguished from God in so many different ways. There's not one person in here who is at total peace with himself.

[16:46] You cannot be. Even as a Christian, you today, and you see, this is one of the wonderful things, one of the great blessings that God gives his people, that God works by bringing peace into our heart.

Remember, we know it so well, the very beginning when God created this world, he created it, a world of harmony and peace. Everything worked together.

Everything lived together as one. and when God created the human race and Adam and Eve, they lived together in oneness, in perfect harmony. No disagreement.

It was a reflection. The creation was a reflection of God himself, who was at peace with himself, who is peace, so that everything was peace.

But of course, the fall broke that. And it didn't just break the peace that Adam and Eve enjoyed with one another. It rippled out over the whole of creation.

[17:51] And that is why the creation to this very day is groaning, because the curse that came upon this world has affected not only us as human beings, but it's affected the whole natural world.

That awful landslide there where you see over in Afghanistan there. And you can multiply that all over. It's because this world is groaning. It is in upheaval.

The world has been broken because of sin, because of the fall. And that's the way it has been all along. And that is why we long for the day when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness and peace.

It's a restoration. In fact, it will be even greater than Eden. It will be greater than what even Adam and Eve enjoyed. Because the amazing thing is that in and through Jesus Christ we will be brought to a greater discovery of God's love and grace and mercy and peace, all these things.

But that's how it was at the beginning, a world of harmony, a world of togetherness. Sin came in, it broke it all up. Adam was blaming Eve. You can see they started running away.

[19:12] Embarrassment came into this world. Shame came into this world. Guilt came into this world. Anger came into this world. The first two boys born into this world, one kills the other.

Cain becomes a wanderer. It's a picture of constant restlessness, movement. moment. The one thing that's missing is peace.

God says there is no peace for the wicked. And if there's one thing people crave in this world, it's peace. And that's what God promises. And this is what God brings through Jesus Christ.

Remember that Jesus is termed the Prince of Peace. And this is one of the wonderful things that God has done in Jesus, is he brings peace into our life.

That doesn't mean that you will never again be troubled or have any form of anxiety. But it means that at the deepest level of your life, something has happened that brings peace.

[20:12] And this is that you are now in a right relationship with God. And you cannot put a price. You cannot value how wonderful that is.

That God is no longer against you. You don't have to run away anymore. God is for you. He is your friend. He is your lover.

He is your king. He is your shield. He is your shepherd. He is for you. Even although things may appear right now to be going against you, he is still for you.

And if God is for you, who can be against you? And so this is what the Lord is saying to his people. And it's what he's saying to us just now as well.

It's peace. The peace of God. Jesus said when he was going to the cross, he said it was like somebody who's reading out his last will.

[21:10] And he's saying right here, what do I leave you? I'm going to die. I'm going to bequeath. I'm going to, here's your inheritance. I'll tell you what it is. This is what it is.

My peace I leave you. My peace I give you. Not as the world gives, give I unto you. That's Jesus' legacy to the church.

And he achieved that through his death. So that the healing process has begun. And we are now running to God. That's what we've done today.

When we come to church, we come here because, you know, the guilt, Jesus has dealt with all these things, these barriers that used to be there. These things that would make us scared in the presence of God.

Maybe some of you, I remember you'd waking up in the middle of the night sometimes and there was this awareness that things were not right between you and God. What if I die?

[ 22 : 12 ] What if I die in this situation? But you know, the great thing is now in Jesus Christ, you know, that even if you die in your sleep, if I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take you.

Prayer used to save when you were weak. That's what the Lord does. Because he has your life in his hand. That's a beauty. Safe in the hand of Jesus.

And so this is what Jesus has won for us. For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans of wholeness and peace, and not for evil.

Even although it may, even although, even although there has been evil in your life, evil things, things that have been, you would describe them as evil.

And yet, the Lord is saying, the plans I have are for wholeness, not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

[ 23 : 17 ] Two of the most precious things that we could want. A future and a hope. And when God says a future, it's a good future. And that's why I'm saying, don't stop just where you are today.

Because you might be hurting. But the Lord is saying, if you can see on, if you can see on, it's going to be good. Right now, you may be saying to yourself, what can be good?

Because my heart is so sore. There's nothing good right now. The Lord is saying, I have plans for you. Trust me. Believe me. This is what, it's not my words. This is what the Lord is saying.

To give you a future and a hope. Hope is one of the most amazing things that we have. Sometimes we take it for granted. To have no hope is a fearful thing.

There are many people in this world today who are living with no hope. If you were, say for instance, in one of the labor camps in North Korea, you would be living with no hope.

[ 24 : 19 ] Because there would be very little chance of you ever getting out of there. And imagine living. You know, there are so many people in this world who are living the most awful lives, crushed lives.

And there is no opening. It doesn't seem like any future, any glimmer of hope for them. But in the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is hope.

There is a future. And that's what God is saying. If we're without Christ in this world, you know what the Bible says? The Bible says, those who are without God and without hope in this world.

That goes together. If a person is without God, they're without hope. Now that doesn't mean that you'll never hope for anything in this world. And it doesn't mean that some of the things you hope for, you will get.

But it's talking about this hope that sort of encapsulates your whole future. future. And if you have God, if God is, the living and true God is your God, then you have a future and a hope.

[ 25 : 29 ] And you know, when there, it's funny, you know what it says? When there's life, there's hope. And that is true spiritually as well. The moment you have life, you have hope.

The moment you have spiritual life, you have hope. You have a hope in Jesus Christ. And the hope, we've often said that the hope of the Christian is very different to the hope of the world.

The hope of the world is simply, I hope so. I hope that such and such a thing will happen. That's what I'm looking forward to. I'm hoping to. But there's no absolute guarantee.

In Jesus Christ there is. Because Jesus has written a guarantee on it. He is a guarantee. Everything in here is guaranteed by him.

He is the basis of our hope. Well today, you have to ask yourself this. Is God my God? If so, then all this is for you.

[ 26 : 30 ] These are promises for you. Rest in them. Believe in them. Accept them. Even although you might be saying, you don't know how hopeless I feel.

How bleak my future seems. This is what the Lord is saying. This is what the Lord is saying. And when we measure it against the fullness and the endlessness of eternity, this is where this future and this hope will be discovered in all its fullness, in all its glory.

And the sufferings of this world will appear. And there might be deep, deep sufferings. But you know the amazing thing is that God works actually all these things round.

To be part of the glory. Our affliction, which is but for a moment, works in us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

That's the way God works it. So that he's actually working so that the end result will exceed your expectations by far.

[ 27 : 43 ] No wonder in Jesus Christ we have hope. Make sure, as we were saying to the young folk today, you're on board with Jesus as captain of your salvation.

Let us pray. Oh Lord, over God.