

PRELIMS. Well, its the beginning of 2012! We are Xns living in a non-Xn culture. And like every other situation, we need to know what God is saying to us in our present circumstances. This passage of God's Word seems applicable to us today as we start a new year. It is good to know that God is with His people, and that His plans for them are always good, *plans of wholeness* (shalom=**completeness**) *and not for evil* - **despite** the fact they were under **judgement! Yes!** To fully understand this passage we need to know the background!

Background: 3 yrs before this letter was written, 3,023 Jews had been carried away captive to Babylon [see 52:28]. In **judgement!** *whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon* [4] for their sins! God had always **promised** to send them away to a foreign land in judgement, if they **remained** unfaithful to Him.

It is **important** for us to understand that although God has sent these Judeans into exile in **judgement**, yet, these particular exiles in Babylon were **obedient** covenant people who had **acknowledged God's judgement** on His people and **obeyed** His word to go to Babylon! The **disobedient** Judeans **remained** in Judah having **refused** to obey the Word of the Lord through Jeremiah's preaching!

You see, Jeremiah had told the Judeans that they were to remove to Babylon and *serve the king of Babylon and live* [27:12,17]. They were told, that if they stayed in Judea there would be famine, pestilence and the sword! [27:13] But these Israelites would **not believe** Jeremiah's preaching about judgement **in the land of Judah!** There were **false prophets** giving **false hope** about being covenant people. **[READ 27:14,15]!** Co-operating with God's Word and command is always best for God's people - even although it may **seem strange!**

There was to be a **great blessing** for those who obeyed the Lord and allowed the Babylonians to carry them away! *When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and I will fulfil My promise... you will call upon Me...and I will hear you...and I will restore your fortunes...and will bring you back to this place from which I sent you into exile* [10+14] **Submission** to God's plan results in blessing!

Covenant **blessings** are connected to covenant **obedience**. You see, the covenant is **DOUBLE-edged!** Obedience brings blessings - disobedience brings curses! Its great if you obey - disastrous if you disobey! But that is what it is to be under the covenant!

APP Now we in the UK are in a similar situation today – we are **not physically** ‘carried away’ to Babylon, but we are spiritually – just look at the films/TV/videos, just go down town and see the posters/ adverts and listen to what people are talking about, and you will discover we are living in Babylon, not Jerusalem! **We are living in a non-Xn culture!** The values and ideals of the people are non-Xn!

THE COMMAND & DUTY

*So, here is an **amazing command** from God to His covenant people in a wicked city! He says “**Settle down** there and marry, raise a family”, **Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their produce, take wives...and have sons and daughters...multiply there, and do not decrease** [5,6] In a wicked culture? Yes. You see, God is the God of **all** the earth. He is the God of the pagans too - they just don’t acknowledge it or realise it! God **IS** at work in pagan cultures! The whole world is in His hands. He is in **control** of all that is going on the **secular** world. In the **bingo** hall, at the **football** match! God has **not** ‘opted out’ of life in the world that He created for His glory. He **IS** fulfilling His plan. The world may be chaos/evil, but God is in **overall** control of what is going on in His universe He **upholds the universe** [He1:3] *by Him* (Christ) **all things hold together** [Col 1:17]

*Now God always planned to have pagans saved! And saved through the **gospel!** But they need someone to bring the gospel to them! Pagans like everyone else will never be saved without someone conveying the Truth to them! And it is usually His own people who do that! So God instructs His people to **remain & be My witnesses!**

APP So you and I, no matter what we may have wanted, or desired, or hoped for, we are where we are today at the beginning of 2012 because of **God’s** Providence and plan. We may be under judgement, but if we are obedient, that plan will be good, if we are disobedient that plan will mean trouble. There is no point in trying to escape from

the **reality** of our present position – God ‘wants’ us here today, and He wants us to **stay** here and make the **most** of our circumstances, until He moves us on in His time and in His way.

*There is a **call for discernment!** There were **false prophets!** *Do not let your prophets and your diviners deceive you and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying in My Name, I did not send them declares the Lord* [8,9] God’s people need to be **awake!** We must not ‘swallow’ everything that comes out of the pulpit! It must be examined! We are to **test the spirits** whether they are of God - because some are **not** from God! In both the OT and NT Church the people were to **exercise discernment** re what the prophets **said!** *If they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them* [dawn] [Isa 8:20 AV]

*They had to **impact the community!** “...*seek the welfare* (shalom) *of the city where I have sent you into exile* [7]. Do **good** in it. Don’t be a **troublemaker!** Don’t start arguments – try your best to **stop** an argument. Be a “*peacemaker*” not a peace destroyer! Easy to get on with! Nice to have around! Good company! Look: How do you rebuke someone? Always in a way which will **not hurt** so much as **heal** – for that is the **purpose** of rebuke. God’s chastisement is always so there will be the *peaceable fruit of righteousness*[H12]

***Pray for the city!** *pray to the Lord on its behalf* [7b] Pray for those around us! Pray for our city councillors, our neighbours, our working colleagues. Seek everyone’s good. The best way to find peace and happiness is to try and give **other** people peace and happiness! Prayer in Inverness years ago ‘Lord help us break the alabaster box of ointment, for if we do, we will get a **share** of the smell’!

GOD’S PROMISE

If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land [Isa 1:19] That was God’s promise to Israel some years before - but it was also true for them in Babylon! If these people remained in Babylon and built houses and raised families and sought the good of the land, then *in its welfare you will find welfare* [7]! Any blessings that Babylon would get, these Israelites would get a share of it!

*But God had **far greater blessings** for Israel in the years to follow if they were **humble** and **repented!** God had great **plans** for them! God said: *I know the **plans** I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for **welfare** and **not for evil**, to give you a **future** and a **hope*** [11] God really **desires** the **prosperity** of His people! He is so willing to forgive us and **restore** the fortunes that we **forfeited** by our disobedience! God sometimes **calls** us to be humble in a way that we are not willing to accept! These Israelites were found it **very hard** and **humiliating** to go and **serve** the king of **Babylon!** But it was **God's will** for them at that time. Judgement is always uncomfortable

APP God still does that to His covenant people living in an alien ungodly culture - He **calls** us and **forces** us into situations that we do not like and can be an **embarrassment** to us, but it is obviously His will! So we must be **humble** and accept that we have to pay for our sins and the 'uncomfortable' situations we may be in are His will for us. But if we are **humble** and repentant, and remember we belong to God and He is faithful and therefore we must remain **faithful** to Him.

Friends, God will bless us in the year ahead if we are humble and acknowledge our **dependence** upon Him. Although we may find circumstances difficult and unappealing - they are God's will for us and our call is to *to **do justice**, and to **love kindness**, and to **walk humbly with your God***, being **truly thankful** for His goodness to us!

God's **long term plan** for His Church is good. The **glory** of the Lord will yet **cover the face of the earth** as the waters cover the bottom of the sea [Hab 2:14] + **ALL the ends of the earth...all** the families of the **nations...all kings will fall down before Him...all nations will serve Him and will turn to the Lord** [Psa 22+72] and one day an angel will cry the *kingdoms of this world **have become** the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ* [Rev 11:15] What a wonderful future for the Church of Jesus Christ! Let **you/I**, no matter how confusing things may seem, **be faithful** to the Lord. God desires and plans **good** for us - let us not refuse that good way of the Lord!