

Jeremiah 29:5-11 *"Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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." 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. ⁹ They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the Lord. ¹⁰ This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. 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.*

Peace and Promise in America

1. Live for peace in America
2. Trust God's promise of hope

Which plan are you on now? Plan B, C, D? In February 2020, we had our usual plans, but all that came to a screeching halt with the onset of the pandemic. Stay-at-home orders and shutdowns changed our plans. Now, we can make new plans, maybe. Do we plan vacations? Do we plan for doctor's appointments again? Do we start visiting local eateries? We can open up church to some degree. But do we still limit the number of people? Do we require social distancing at communion? Should our school require vaccinations? What should we plan for?

Sometimes, we plan but our plans don't turn out like we wanted. The Jews, in exile in Babylon, planned to try to return home to Judah just as soon as they could. Spurred on by false prophets who told them everything was going to be back to normal real soon, they planned to return. That was not God's plan.

The 29th chapter of Jeremiah is a letter God had the prophet write to the exiles in Babylon. What he tells them in this letter – the directions and the promise – is specific to that time and place. But we can apply it to ourselves on this Fourth of July. We can look for peace and promise in America.

Have you been to a Brewer game yet? They are now at full capacity in Am-Fam field. After a game, what might you do? If it's an afternoon game, you might go to a restaurant to eat. You stop at someplace near the park and it's full of Brewer fans. Then in walk some Cub fans and everybody just stops and stares. How do you think they would feel? They would feel out of place, awkward, ready to turn around and walk out. That's the way the Jews in Babylon felt. This was the enemy. Babylon had attacked Judah, destroyed Jerusalem and carried the best and brightest into exile. The exiles just wanted to leave and go home again.

Like Jewish exiles, we too may feel out of place in this world. We are surrounded by those who mock and belittle our faith. We are different from them and sometimes we may wonder why God just doesn't take us home. But like with the Jews, God often has other plans. He wrote to them, *Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce*. Although they were living in a foreign land, God told them to make a life there.

While God preserves us in this world, we too need to make a life here. We may not fit in. We may not have the same worldview as those around us. We may be frustrated by the politics and the news, but where we are right now in history, in this country is where God wants us to be. We sometimes say, "Bloom where you are planted." And that's what God is saying here. Make a life where and when God has planted you. Support and promote peace in the country God has placed you.

We are often in situations where we are uncomfortable. Sometimes, we are in jobs that we do not want to be in, and cities where we would rather not live. We feel sometimes that God is far away, otherwise God wouldn't have allowed us to be in the situation that we find ourselves. Jeremiah would assert that God put us where we are. Even though God's ways may be hidden from us, that doesn't mean that God isn't involved. Wherever we are, we can celebrate that God knows that we are there and God is with us.

So, what's the best thing we can do? *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. ⁷ 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.* The best thing we can do is work toward having strong families. Even though our society is doing all it can to tear down the family, the best thing we can do for our country is to have strong families.

Another important thing for us to do is to pray for our country. Seek the peace and prosperity of our nations. People tell us these days that America is evil. It's founding and its institutions are corrupt. But look at Babylon. It was not just a corrupt nation; it was Judah's enemy. It was destroying Jerusalem. It was not a nation to be proud of. Nevertheless, God told his people to work and pray for the good of that nation because it would be a blessing to them.

Those today who would promote the tearing down of America are not following the Bible. Jesus and Paul both promoted submission to the Roman government and paying taxes to that government. Working for and praying for the good of the nation in which we live is godly. Tearing it down and trying to undermine it is not. Keeping peace in our country, promoting law and order, working for the prosperity of the citizens of our country is something we should do as Christians. When there is peace and prosperity in the nation, it will be a blessing to the church.

So, we may need to ask, "How much so we pray for our country?" Are we guilty of taking this nation, its peace and prosperity for granted? "God Bless Our Native Land" can't just be a song we sing, but a prayer that we pray and a way of life that we follow.

Let's live for peace in America. Let's also trust God's promise. *This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. 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.* God had plans. He was thinking of them. What a wonderful assurance. God thought about the people of Judah when they walked in the streets of a strange city and heard a strange language. God thought of them when their captors mocked them and abused them. God thought of them when they lay down on the banks of the Babylonian canals and cried under the willows as they thought of Jerusalem. God would think about them throughout the captivity that would last for seventy years. Never for a second would God forget his own eternal plan and purpose with respect to them. God had prepared these plans with great care. His mind does not know the word "chance." He has omitted no detail. God had plans for them.

Take a look over God's shoulder at his plans for you. They were written in the distant past. Before he formed you, he knew you. All the days ordained for you were written in his book before one of them came to be. God chose you in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. Jesus took human flesh for you. He died bearing the punishment for your sins. He seized life again so that you, too, can live. The culmination of God's plan for you will endure forever in heaven.

God is thinking of you today. He is thinking of your future. God will never forget you. When you are stressed by life and your conscience bothers you, you will face the truth that there are many reasons for God to dismiss you and ignore you. But that is not what God is thinking of you. Yes, he hates your sin. He hates your disobedience, your lust, your greed. But in Christ he has put away your sins. His thoughts are not thoughts of evil but thoughts of peace.

That we know for certain because God has told us in his Word. But what about God's plans for our country. On this Fourth of July, that's in our minds, isn't it? We know what we would plan. We would plan for our country to be strong, moral and economically sound. We would plan for the stock market to grow and for inflation to be low. We would plan for security in our cities and peace on our borders. But what does God plan for America? We don't know.

But look at the mural over there. It pictures the Lamb of God standing on a book with seven seals. This is a symbolic presentation of Revelation chapter 5. In Revelation 5, John sees a scroll that no one can open. He is distressed because no one can open the scroll and its seven seals. But then comes in the Lamb of God who can open the scroll. The scroll is world history until Jesus returns. What that mural is saying and what Revelation 5 is telling us is that Jesus, the Lamb of God, who was slain and came to life again, knows the history of the world. More than that, he controls the history of the world and he promises to make it all work for the good of the church.

God's plans for us and for our country may not be our plans, but we can trust that God knows what he is doing. He has history in his hands and he will make everything work out for the good of his elect. So, pray for peace and trust God's promise.