

We turn to the only book we need to study if we want to be wise. We're studying chapter 29 and 30 of the book of Jeremiah this morning. Came across a lovely little cutting from a magazine this week. By the way, could we have the lights on up here? It's a dull morning and, “God is ***LIGHT*** and in him is no darkness at all,” and I always feel it's much better to have a bit of light. Might help me too, to be a little quicker. Here is the cutting from the magazine. A lady writing said, “As I was passing my nine-year-old daughter's door, I overhead her praying and she said, ‘Dear God, I like the Bible. Have you written any ***MORE*** books?’ “

The answer is ***YES***. He has written ***MANY*** more books. He has written the ***BIOGRAPHY*** of every one of you. And one day on the day of judgment, those books will be ***OPENED***…and read every one of them. But he's written ***ANOTHER*** book still, which I've never seen…you've never seen, but I just hope and pray your name’s in it because it's ***‘THE LAMB’S BOOK OF LIFE’*** and one day that will be read too. But until we read those books, or until they're opened, this is the only book that you need to open if you want to be wise. There are many other books that will make you clever, but this one (***THE BIBLE***) will make you ***WISE***. So, we're studying the book of Jeremiah, and I want to read chapter 29 and 30. We listen to God here before we worship him. We ***LISTEN*** to what he has to say to us, and then we respond as a family in ***PRAYER*** and ***PRAISE***.

*These are the words of the letter which* ***JEREMIAH*** *the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the* ***ELDERS*** *of the exiles, and to the* ***PRIESTS****, the* ***PROPHETS****, and all the* ***PEOPLE****, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into* ***EXILE*** *from Jerusalem to Babylon. This was after King Jeconiah, and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem. The letter was sent by the hand of Elsah the son of Shaphan and Gematrias the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. It said: "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the* ***EXILES*** *whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for* ***IN ITS WELFARE, YOU WILL FIND YOUR WELFARE****,”* (we shall come back to that; but that’s God’s idea of the ‘welfare state’). “*For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you* ***DECEIVE*** *you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream, for it is a* ***LIE*** *which they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them,’ says the LORD.*

*"For thus says the LORD: ‘When* ***SEVENTY YEARS*** *are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the* ***PLANS*** *I have for you,’ says the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and* ***PRAY*** *to me, and I will* ***HEAR*** *you. You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with* ***ALL YOUR HEART****, I will be found by you,’ says the LORD, ‘and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you,’ says the LORD, ‘and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.’*

*"Because you have said, 'The LORD has raised up prophets for us in Babylon,' ---Thus says the LORD concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, and concerning all the people who dwell in this city, your kinsmen who did not go out with you into exile: Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Behold, I am sending on them* ***SWORD****,* ***FAMINE****, and* ***PESTILENCE****, and I will make them like vile figs which are so bad they cannot be eaten. I will pursue them with sword, famine, and pestilence, and will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, a* ***TERROR****, a hissing, and a reproach among all the nations where I have driven them, because they* ***DID NOT HEED MY WORDS****,’ says the LORD, ‘which I persistently sent to you by my servants the prophets, but you would not listen, says the LORD.' Hear the word of the LORD, all you* ***EXLES*** *whom I sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon: 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kaliiah and Zedekiah the son of Maasemia’s, who are prophesying a lie to you in my name: Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall slay them before your eyes. Because of them this curse shall be used by all the exiles from Judah in Babylon: "The LORD make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire," because they have committed folly in Israel, they have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives, and they have spoken in my name lying words which I did not command them. I am the one who knows, and I am witness, says the LORD.'"*

*To Shemaiah of Nehelam you shall say: "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘You have sent letters in your name to all the people who are in Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests, saying, “The LORD has made you priest instead of Jehoiada the priest, to have charge in the house of the LORD over every madman who prophesies, to put him in the stocks and collar.” Now why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth who is prophesying to you? For he has sent to us in Babylon, saying, "Your exile will be long; build houses and live in them, and plant gardens and eat their produce."'"*

*Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the hearing of Jeremiah the prophet. Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: "Send to all the exiles, saying, 'Thus says the LORD concerning Shemaiah of Nehelam: “Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you when I did not send him, and has made you trust in a lie, therefore thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will punish Shemaiah of Nehel'am and his descendants; he shall not have any one living among this people to see the good that I will do to my people,’ says the LORD, ‘for he has talked* ***REBELLION*** *against the LORD.'"‘“*

*The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: ‘Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you. For behold, days are coming, says the LORD, when I will* ***RESTORE THE FORTUNES OF MY PEOPLE****, Israel and Judah,’ says the LORD, ‘and I will bring them back to the land which I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it.’"*

*These are the words which the LORD spoke concerning Israel and Judah: "Thus says the LORD: ‘We have heard a cry of* ***PANIC****, of* ***TERROR****, and* ***NO PEACE****. Ask now, and see, can a man bear a child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor? Why has every face turned pale?’ Alas! that day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of* ***DISTRESS*** *for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it.*

*"And it shall come to pass in that day,” says the LORD of hosts, “that I will break the yoke from off their neck, and I will burst their bonds, and strangers shall no more make servants of them. But they shall serve the LORD their God and* ***DAVID THEIR KING*** *(Messiah!), whom I will raise up for them.*

*"Then fear not, O Jacob my servant,” says the LORD, “nor be dismayed, O Israel; for lo, I will save you from afar, and your offspring from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with you to save you,” says the LORD; “I will make a full end of all the nations among whom I scattered you; but of you I will not make a full end. I will chasten you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished.*

*"For thus says the LORD: ‘Your hurt is* ***INCURABLE****, and your wound is* ***GRIEVOUS****. There is none to uphold your cause, no medicine for your wound, no healing for you. All your lovers have forgotten you; they care nothing for you; for I have dealt you the blow of an enemy, the punishment of a merciless foe, because your* ***GUILT IS GREAT****, because your* ***SINS ARE FLAGRANT****. Why do you cry out over your hurt? Your pain is* ***INCURABLE****. Because your guilt is great, because your sins are flagrant, I have done these things to you. Therefore, all who devour you shall be devoured, and all your foes, every one of them, shall go into captivity; those who despoil you shall become a spoil, and* ***ALL WHO PREY ON YOU, I WILL MAKE A PREY****. For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, says the LORD, because they have called you an outcast: “It is Zion, for whom no one cares!”'”*

*"Thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob and have compassion on his dwellings; the city shall be* ***REBUILT*** *upon its mound, and the palace shall stand where it used to be. Out of them shall come songs of thanksgiving, and the voices of those who make merry. I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will make them honored, and they shall not be small. Their children shall be as they were of old, and their congregation shall be established before me; and I will punish all who oppress them. Their* ***PRINCE*** *shall be one of themselves, their* ***RULER*** *shall come forth from their midst; I will make him draw near, and he shall approach me, for who would dare of himself to approach me?’ says the LORD. ‘And you shall be* ***MY PEOPLE****, and I will be* ***YOUR GOD****.’"*

*Behold the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his mind. In the latter days you will understand this.*

Well now, the **KEY VERSE** for this morning, as you would guess is, *“You will* ***SEEK*** *me and* ***FIND*** *me, when you seek me with* ***ALL YOUR HEART****. I will be found by you.”* I'm going to ask David; he is going to sing the aria from Mendelson's Elijah: ‘If with all your heart you truly seek me’.

***Singing (2 Minutes)***

Let's bow our heads for a prayer. "Lord, you do know us better than anyone else, even better than we know ourselves. And Lord, we thank you that if there's anybody here who's not found you yet, that if they really bring their whole heart to you this morning and not seek you in any half-hearted way, that they need not leave this building without you. But may all of us come wholeheartedly. Lord, people can sit and watch television for hours. We want to sit at your feet like Mary and ***LISTEN*** to your words ... In Jesus' name, amen."

***Jeremiah Goes From the Spoken to the Written Word***

When we get to Jeremiah chapter 29, there are ***TWO MAJOR CHANGES*** that take place. The ***FIRST*** is that Jeremiah switches from the spoken to the ***WRITTEN*** word, and he starts writing letters and books. And the ***SECOND*** is that he stops being so pessimistic and becomes ***OPTIMISTIC***. And the '*doom and gloom'* give way to a very *'rosy hope'* for the future. And I'm sure you sense the change of tone as we read through these two chapters. Now these two changes are ***NOT UNRELATED***. Let me try and explain. ***WORDS*** are very powerful things. They are ***WEAPONS***. Words can bring great ***BLESSING***, and they can bring terrible ***DESTRUCTION***. Many of the world's ***DICTATORS*** have known just how powerful words can be. But the ***WRITTEN*** word can be powerful as well as the ***SPOKEN*** word. And in some situations the written word has ***ADVANTAGES*** over the spoken word.

Now, Jeremiah lived before the days of ***TAPE RECORDING*** but not before the days of ***WRITING***. Had he lived in the days of tape recording, he would've made a ***TAPE*** for the exiles in Babylon. Because that is the device we can now use to take a word through distance in space. And he needed to ***SEND HIS WORDS*** a few hundred miles across the desert. So, he ***WROTE A LETTER***.

***Written Words Can Travel Farther Over Time and Space***

So, here's the ***FIRST ADVANTAGE*** of the written over the spoken word. It can ***TRAVEL FURTHER*** than the spoken word---certainly could before the days of radio and tape recording---now, of course, that has really ***INCREASED*** our capacity to spread the word. And so, he wrote a ***LETTER***.

But there's another (***SECOND***) ***ADVANTAGE*** of the written word, and it's this: not only can it ***TRAVEL*** great distances in ***SPACE***, it can also ***TRAVEL*** distances in ***TIME*.** Because, at the moment, if I had no recording being made of this message, every word is ***LOST***. And it is limited in its ***EFFECT*** to what you remember of it afterwards. And I don't expect you to remember everything. I'm not preaching a sermon for that purpose. I'm preaching a sermon in which I hope that God will say ***ONE*** thing to every ***SINGLE ONE*** of you at some point, and that you'll ***REMEMBER*** that and go away and do something about it. But you see, if it's ***WRITTEN***, it can ***TRAVEL*** down through the ***CENTURIES***. The Chinese say, "If you want to be remembered after you're dead, then do one of FOUR things: build a ***HOUSE***, plant a ***TREE***, have a ***SON***, or write a ***BOOK***. Because all those four things will go on ***INFLUENCING*** other people ***AFTER YOU'RE GONE***.

And so, Jeremiah---who up to this point has relied on the ***SPOKEN*** word---now turns to the ***WRITTEN*** word. In chapter 29 he writes a ***LETTER*** which travels a great distance through ***SPACE*** from Jerusalem to Babylon. In chapter 30 he writes a ***BOOK*** which will come into its own in 70 years’ time and will ***TRAVEL DOWN THROUGH THE DECADES*** and will therefore, be used later. And here we are reading the ***BOOK*** now---2,400 years later. And so that's the advantage of ***WRITING***.

And so, here we have Jeremiah moving from the ***SPOKEN*** to the ***WRITTEN*** word. Now, because of this---that he is able to project his word through ***SPACE*** and particularly through ***TIME*** into the future---he's able to turn from the ***PESSIMISTIC*** message of doom and gloom in the ***PRESENT***, to the ***OPTIMISTIC*** message of hope in the ***FUTURE***. You see how they're ***RELATED***. And he's able to write a ***BOOK*** that is not doom and gloom, but tremendously full of ***HOPE***. He doesn't leave ALL of God's anger and wrath behind---because that would be to distort the picture. And there are still little glimpses of God's anger. But most of it now is God's ***COMPASSION***, God's ***LOVE***, God's ***KINDNESS***. And I'm sure you're ***RELIEVED*** to get to this after plowing through the doom and gloom since last October.

***Jeremiah Sends a Message of Hope to the Exiles in Babylon***

Now, let me just give you a little ***HISTORY LESSON*** to give you the setting. ***BABYLON*** is now a growing empire with ***SATELLITE*** countries around it, in very much the same relation to it as Hungary and Poland and Czechoslovakia are to Soviet Russia. And Nebuchadnezzar's policy with countries that he took into the kind of overall circle was this: he would ***REMOVE*** from the country, as soon as he captured it, all the ***TOP LAYER*** of society. It would include the ***POLITICAL*** figures, the ***RELIGIOUS*** leaders. It even included the skilled ***CRAFTSMEN*** and ***SMITHS***. So that he left behind a population that could not rise again---a poor people with ***NO LEADERSHIP***. And then he would set over them a ***PUPPET KING*** whom he thought he could keep under his control. Now he wasn't brutal or harsh---at any rate, in his ***EARLY*** days. He took away that top layer of society. He took them to his own country, which ***ENHANCED*** that with gifted people. And he gave them ***RELATIVE FREEDOM*** to build up their own settlements within his empire---within his capital or near it. Now, have you got the picture? So, that when Nebuchadnezzar ***FIRST*** took Jerusalem, he took away 3,032 people to Babylon---al the top layer of society and all the skilled artisans .... ***TOOK THEM ALL AWAY.*** And he left behind some thousands of unskilled, illiterate, ***POOR PEOPLE***. And he put in charge of them a man called ***ZEDEKIAH***, who he rightly discerned was a rather ***WEAK MAN*** whom he could keep right there. And it is in that situation that Jeremiah (if you remember last week) said to those who were left behind, *"You are going to be* ***OBLITERATED****."* It's almost as if God was going to build up a ***NEW NATION*** from the "*choice*" Jews who'd been taken away.

But Jeremiah now writes to those who have already suffered for their sins by being ***TAKEN AWAY*** from their homes. And, therefore, having been ***CHASENED*** and ***PUNISHED***, he can now speak to them more ***TENDERLY***. You do the same with your children. When they've done wrong, you punish them. But when they've suffered a bit of punishment, don't you change and begin to talk to them gently and nicely ... and ***RESTORE*** the relationship and try and get them back to where they were. And God begins to do this. And Jeremiah has to ***WRITE TO BABYLON*** to begin to ***RESTORE*** their confidence in God and the relationship between them.

And so, he's going to say to them, *"****NOW****...now will you seek him with your* ***WHOLE HEART****?* ***NOW*** *will you* ***GET BACK TO THE LORD****? Because if you get back to the Lord, you can come* ***BACK TO THE LAND****. So, seek him with your whole heart, and* ***YOUR FUTURE'S ROSY****."*

But he also had to write for a ***NEGATIVE*** reason, because there were ***PROPHETS*** appearing---self-style prophets, ***FALSE*** prophets appearing---not only in ***JERUSALEM***, denying Jeremiah's message, but appearing among the exiles in ***BABYLON*** to say, *"It's all right. This empire (Babylon) is gonna collapse in just a year or two, and we'll all be able to go back."*

Jeremiah said, *"That is* ***NOT*** *true. You'll stay there for 70 years, and that gives you a chance to* ***GET RIGHT WITH THE LORD****. So, you start seeking him* ***HARD****, and one day God will* ***BRING******YOU******BACK****."* But the prophets out there in Babylon said, *"Rubbish, don't you Listen to Jeremiah."* One of them, called Shemaiah, even wrote a letter back to a priest in Jerusalem and says, *"God has told me that you must take over the job of High Priest, and you must put this crazy prophet called Jeremiah in the* ***STOCKS****."* And that was the situation. Poor old Jeremiah, he stands ***ALONE***. He stands ***ALONE*** in ***JERUSALEM***. He stands ***ALONE*** in the eyes of ***BABYLON***. And he's got to fight on ***TWO FRONTS*** now, and speak to ***TWO GROUPS*** of Jews, not one: the one ***AROUND HIM*** and the one away there in ***EXILE***. He can only speak to them (the exiles) by ***LETTER***. And so, chapter 29 is written as a ***LETTER***. I think I've set the scene.

***Three Words of Advice To the Babylonian Exiles***

The letter of chapter 29 to the exiles may simply be divided into ***THREE PARTS***: a word of ***ADVICE***, a word of ***PROMISE***, and a word of ***WARNING***. Now I want you to take those ***THREE WORDS*** as from God (this morning) to you: a word of ***ADVICE***, a word of ***PROMISE***, and a word of ***WARNING***.

***First Word: A Word of Advice***

Here is ***(1)*** the word of ***ADVICE***. The ***INSTINCT***, when you are a subjugated people, is to ***RESIST*** and to ***ESCAPE***. That's the instinct. This is what happened to many Frenchmen, during the war, when the Germans overran France. The human instinct is---if you have the courage and the opportunity---to join a resistant movement. When the Romans were occupying ***ISRAEL***, their instinct was to become ***ZEALOTS*** (or terrorists). And our human instinct is not to like to be under the control of another nation, and to want to get out of it...or at any rate, a policy of non-cooperation---the kind of policy that Gandhi adopted, a non-violent, passive, but non-cooperation with a colonial power. That's the human instinct: ***TO GET OUR FREEDOM BACK***.

And Jeremiah's ***WORD OF ADVICE*** from the Lord was ***TWOFOLD***: ***COLONIZE*** and ***COOPERATE***. *"Don't try and escape. Don't try and resist. Build houses; live in them. Plant gardens; get their produce. Have children; have grandchildren. You are going to be there for 70 years. And my advice from the Lord is this:* ***COOPERATE*** *with Babylon. Pray for it (Babylon). Seek its welfare; because if* ***BABYLON*** *is blessed,* ***YOU*** *will be blessed. Your welfare depends on the occupying power. So,* ***COOPERATE****."* Now, that is ***NOT*** popular advice to those who have been forcibly put under another power, and it never will be. That's one of the reasons the crowd was so disappointed with Jesus, because he would ***NOT*** lead an insurrection. They said, *"Give us Barabbas! He's a terrorist. He'll get us free from this power!"* That's the message the WORLD responds to. But Jeremiah had to say, *"God's advice is:* ***COOPERATE****--- because, the better* ***BABYLON*** *is, the better* ***YOU*** *will be. And therefore, seek* ***ITS*** *welfare, because therein lies* ***YOUR*** *welfare."* In other words, *"Try and* ***HELP BABYLON*** *all you can. That is God's will for you."*

The advice appears in the ***NEW TESTAMENT***, as you know, "***SUBMIT TO THOSE IN AUTHORITY***." And that word was said when ***NERO*** was the emperor. It is ***NOT*** popular advice. To bring it right home.... I have been consulted this very week by one of you about a situation in which---because this country is living above its financial means---the education authorities have been told they have got to cut some things. And in one case near Guildford, they are cutting a bus that is taking a few children back to a village. And the mothers have got together to make a protest, and to stop this, and withdraw their children from the school, until they put that bus back on. And so, a member of the congregation rings me up and says, "What does a ***CHRISTIAN*** do in that situation?"

See you're right in it here. Do you protest? Do you fight? What do you do? Well in general terms, I think Christians have got to set an ***EXAMPLE***, and it's going to be very ***UNPOPULAR*** and very ***COSTLY***. But we have got to say---if we found ourselves in this situation---I believe we have got to say, "We are living above our means, as a country. We are getting services that we can't afford. Therefore, we will give an ***EXAMPLE*** of living within our means, and we'll find some way to get our kids to school---in some other way. But we are going to help the government, because*: 'In* ***ITS*** *welfare, lies OUR* ***welfare****.' "*

Now you can take me to task about that afterwards; but I'm trying to show you the kind of situation which Jeremiah was speaking. And he would get exactly the same reaction---as I shall get from some of you---as I got last week on my remarks on Northern Ireland! But you see, Jeremiah had to give them ***UNPOPULAR*** advice that would put them *'out of gear'* with the ***POPULAR*** feeling, which is: "Fight the government!" And so, Jeremiah said, "**COOPERATE**. Build your houses. Build your gardens. **PRAY** for the Babylonian emperor who took you off in chains. **PRAY** for him." That was his advice. And godly men followed that advice. That's why ***DANIEL*** got so high in the Babylonian government. That's why, later, ***ESTHER*** cooperated with a foreign power. And the Bible is full of such examples. Verses five to seven are in ***POETRY***:

*"****BUILD*** *your houses and live in them.* ***PLANT*** *your gardens and get their produce.* ***GET WIVES*** *for your sons and have children.* ***GET WIVES*** *for your sons' sons."* And so on. It's sheer poetry, this. But he's trying to make them a little ***POEM***---a doggerel---that will be ***REPEATED*** around the streets.

You see, as over against the ***DIVINE WISDOM***, there is the ***HUMAN WISH***, all the time. And the human wish is ***CONTRARY*** to divine wisdom. The ***WISDOM*** of God is ***FOOLISHNESS*** to men; and the human, rational mind ***CAN'T SEE*** the wisdom of God. ***HUMAN WISHES*** and ***DIVINE WISDOM*** are often ***POLES APART***. And human wishes are often fostered by ***RELIGIOUS LEADERS***, who are prepared to tell people what they ***WANT TO HEAR***. And Jeremiah says, *"You've got* ***DREAMERS*** *and* ***PROPHETS*** *out there in Babylon, who are telling you what* ***YOU******WANT TO HEAR****. They're dreaming dreams .... They’re dreaming dreams of getting back to Jerusalem. Those dreams will not come true for 70 years! So, you build your houses and live in them.* ***DON'T LISTEN*** *to human wishes, even if they come from religious lips...even if they come from people who claim to be speaking the word of the Lord. It's a* ***LIE****!"* says Jeremiah. *"Choose between* ***DIVINE WISDOM****---which I offer you---and* ***HUMAN WISHES****, coming from your own prophets. And you* ***COOPERATE****, and* ***PRAY*** *for Babylon, and* ***SEEK*** *its welfare."*

**Second Word: A Word of Promise**

Now ***SECONDLY***: A word of ***PROMISE***. Even though he says, *"You're going to be there for 70 years...."* And that's a long time. That's more than a generation---two generations... *"Even though you're going to be there 70 years,"* Jeremiah says, *"nevertheless, here is a word of* ***PROMISE****: Expect to* ***RETURN*** *from Babylon. Don't get so deeply rooted there that when the time comes to come back, you can't uproot and return."* Now here is a ***DELICATE BALANCE***! *"You are staying there. You are exiles and aliens, but stay there and cooperate! But never stay there so deeply that you can't leave it. Expect to come back. Because here is a word of* ***PROMISE****: 'After 70 years, I am going to bring you* ***BACK****. I am giving you a* ***HOPE*** *and a* ***FUTURE****. I have got plans for your* ***WELFARE****.' "* And I praise God -- I live in a ***WELFARE STATE***! It's not a ***HUMAN*** one, it's a ***DIVINE*** one! ***THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS A WELFARE STATE***! And God says, *"I have plans for* ***YOUR*** *welfare. At the moment, your welfare lies in the welfare of* ***BABYLON****; but I have* ***PLANS*** *to bring you to the place where I plan your welfare. And I have got a* ***HOPE*** *and a* ***FUTURE*** *for you."*

And now, you get a lovely, divine ***PROMISE*** of God's ***FAITHFULNESS***. He has made his ***PLANS***! He will keep his ***PROMISE***! And in this next section: verses 10 to 14, five times God says, "***I WILL***." "I ***WILL." "I WILL." "IWILL." "I WILL."*** There will be a wedding here on Saturday, and two people will say, "I will." But they will only say it once each! I sometimes want to count up---If ever I had time---I'd count up how often God says*, "I will."* He says it 17 times (or is it 19 times?) in the two chapters I just read to you. "***I WILL***." ***"I WILL*** bring you back." "***I WILL*** restore your fortunes." "***I WILL*** give you a hope." "***I WILL*** give you a future." "***I WILL*** plan your welfare." "***I WILL."*** That is the ***DIVINE FAITHFULNESS***.

***God's Requirement: Wholeheartedness***

But God then reminds them, through Jeremiah, that ***DIVINE FAITHFULNESS*** is often matched by ***HUMAN FICKLENESS***. We've just sung it -- "Great is Thy Faithfulness...." Yes, it is. But we ought also to sing, "Great is our fickleness, Oh God our Father...." What do I mean by that? I mean that, in spite of the fact that God says, *"I will,” “I will,” “I will,” “I will"* -- We are still ***HALF-HEARTED*** about it. That's what I mean. In spite of the fact that he plans a glorious future for his people, we can be half-hearted---even in singing hymns about it! And so, God says, *"IF, with ALL your* ***HEART****---****THAT'S*** *the response I'm looking for! I will give you a* ***HOPE****---IF you will give me your* ***HEART****."* That (***WHOLEHEARTEDNESS***), in a sentence, is the ***THEME*** of this whole ***SERVICE***, as you will see later.... of our ***WORSHIP***.... of ***EVERYTHING***. *“I will give you* ***HOPE****, if you give me your* ***HEART****. If with all your heart you truly* ***SEEK*** *me, you'll* ***FIND****; me and your* ***FUTURE*** *is secure.”*

Well now, that's the ***HEART*** of the message of the promise here. Now, it's not easy to test whether you're ***WHOLEHEARTED***. I took the hymnbook this morning, and I just went through one or two hymns, and I read this, for example---both by Germans as it happens. There have been some great German hymn writers. God has moved and done ***LOVELY*** things in that country---as well as ***DREADFUL*** things. Listen to this: "Though waves and storms go over my head;… Though strength and health and friends begone;… Though joys be withered, all are dead;… ***THOUGH EVERY COMFORT BE WITHDRAWN***;… On this my steadfast soul relies;… ***FATHER, THY MERCY NEVER DIES."*** That's wholehearted, isn't it? ***EVERY*** comfort withdrawn. Could you say that this morning? If God took your bed away and the roof over your head and your central heating and your car---***EVERY*** comfort, could you still say ***WHOLEHEARTEDLY***, "He's all I need."

Or take another hymn. I just turned the pages, and I came to the Marseilles of the reformation. I'm "***FESTE BURG***" (A safe stronghold). Our God is still listening;… And though they take our life, goods, honor, children, wife;… yet is there profit small?... These things shall ***VANISH***;… all the city of God ***REMAINETH***.

Now these are hymns written by ***WHOLEHEARTED*** people. Do you see? And one of the reasons why many people can't find God is they're so ***HALFHEARTED*** about it. They've given ***PART*** of their heart to their career, another ***PART*** to their family, another ***PART*** to their home and garden, another ***PART*** to this, that and the other. And they've only got a bit left for ***GOD***. And they want...they would like God...they would like to find him; but there's only a ***LITTLE BIT*** of their heart to find him with. There's only a little bit of their heart for him to occupy, and he can't get in. He's too big*..."If with* ***ALL*** *your heart...you'll find me, and your future is absolutely* ***SECURE****, rosy, wonderful."* Do you get the message? That's the word of ***PROMISE*** which Jeremiah sent to the ***EXILES*** at Babylon; and since he ***WROTE*** it down, I can pass it on to you this morning.

***Third Word: A Word of Warning***

Now finally **(3)** the ***WORD OF WARNING***. The word of warning is this--- by the way, do you notice that He says, *"You'll be found of me in* ***BABYLON****...****WITHOUT*** *a temple,* ***WITHOUT*** *a priest,* ***WITHOUT*** *an altar,* ***WITHOUT*** *a sacrifice...You will be found of me."* And that's the beginning of the New Testament. It's the beginning of the synagogue, and we are a synagogue this morning. We have ***NO*** high altar, we have ***NO*** priest, we have ***NO*** sacrifice. This is not a temple. "But if you seek me ***WITH ALL YOUR HEART***, you will be found of me."

Now the word of ***WARNING***: "***AVOID PROPHECY IN BABYLON."*** Jeremiah is wondering how his letter will be received. He knows that these ***FALSE*** prophets are saying, *"Jeremiah's a* ***LIAR****, he's crazy. Put him in the stocks."* He knows they're saying, *"Babylon will* ***FALL*** *in a year or two and we can all go home."* He knows it's not true and he's thinking. So, he sends in the letter a ***WARNING***. He says, *"Beware of that man, Ahab. Beware of that man, Zedekiah. I know them both, I know what they're saying. They're telling you what you want to hear. But it's a* ***LIE****."* You see a man of God who's going to speak the word of God has to do ***TWO*** things. He has to ***(1)*** ***EXPRESS THE TRUTH*** and he has to ***(2)*** ***EXPOSE THE LIE***. And that's why preaching becomes ***UNPOPULAR.***

I've had people say to me, "I wish you'd stick to the ***POSITIVE*** things and keep off the negative. You know, just be positive and say all the things we can say ***YES*** to; but don't say ***NO*** to anything." That's exactly what our world wants. The world wants the kind of ***TOLERANCE*** rather than the truth of ***ANTITHESIS***, whereby if ***THIS*** is true, ***THAT*** is not true. The world wants ***BOTH*** to be true, and a ***MIXTURE*** to be made, but it can't be. If Christianity is ***RIGHT***, every other religion in the world is ***WRONG***, and you can't get over that ***ANTITHESIS***. But the world wants to hear us say, "All religions are roads leading to the same goal, and you take the best bits of each and lump it all together," and have what Foster Dulles started---the Congress of World Faiths in the Cow Palace of San Francisco---and you are home and dry...you've got a ***WORLD RELIGION***. But it never works. You see, ***TRUTH*** is always seen against ***LIES***. And if the word of God is ***TRUE***, then things that men say are ***LIES*** and you've got to say ***BOTH***. And the word of God is, "*You'll be in Babylon* ***70*** *years,"* and the ***LIE*** is, *"You will be in Babylon* ***two*** *years."* The prophet has to ***EXPOSE THE LIE*** as well as ***EXPRESS THE TRUTH***.

So, Jeremiah says, *"I tell you I've been preaching in Jerusalem, and you're in Babylon because you* ***DIDN'T LISTEN TO WHAT I SAID****. And I tell you now that those who are left in Jerusalem will be followed by* ***FAMINE****,* ***SWORD****, and* ***PESTILENCE*** *until there's nothing left of them. You see if I'm true. You see if* ***MY*** *word is right; and don't you go listening to those* ***FALSE*** *prophets of yours, especially that man who says,"...*who's been writing letters back here to Jerusalem and saying, *"Get Jeremiah, that crazy man in a collar and stocks."*

Jeremiah says, *"I tell you what will happen to* ***SHAMAIAH****. Nebuchadnezzar will throw him into the fire."* And that was Nebuchadnezzar’s way of dealing with those whom he regarded as potential rivals and traitors. That's what he did with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego...or what was done to them later. And so, *"Shamiah, he'll be thrown in the fire."* That would only anticipate his ultimate end because in fact, those who ***DISTORT*** God's word---those who deny it, those who reject it, those who say the opposite---they are heading for fire anyway. There's a ***LAKE OF FIRE*** for false prophets. And if Nebuchadnezzar just brought that a little early, it was, in any case, what was happening.

God says, *"I am He who* ***KNOWS****."* There it is Verse 23, *"I am the one who* ***KNOWS****."* No one else does. I tell you Mr. Callahan (Prime Minister) doesn't know where we're going, nor does Brezhnev, nor does Jerry Ford. They don't know where we're going. The Lord says, *"I Am the one who* ***KNOWS****."* He doesn't need any other witnesses. He says, *"And I Am* ***WITNESS****."* And so, God needs no one but ***HIMSELF*** to tell the truth. He's the one who ***KNOWS*** and he's his own ***WITNESS***. What more do you need? The word of God has to be taken on God's word. If I may put it that way. I didn't think of saying that till just that second. So let me repeat. It sounded rather good to me. ***THE WORD OF GOD MUST BE TAKEN ON GOD'S WORD***. *"I am the one who* ***KNOWS****, and I am* ***WITNESS****,"* says the Lord.

Well now so much for the letter and I could leave it there except for one thing. I just want to apply chapter 29 to you because I am speaking to ***EXILES*** this morning. Every one of you is a ***FOREIGNER***. You do not belong to the United Kingdom in the last analysis, that is if you are a ***CHRISTIAN***. Because the simple fact is that the day you became a Christian---that day---you became an ***ALIEN*** in the United Kingdom. You became a citizen of ***ANOTHER KINGDOM***. You became a sojourner, a pilgrim passing through---you no longer belong. Here's a quote from a letter written from one Christian, very early on, to a man who was not impressed with Christianity, a man called Diognetus. And this letter was written to Diognetus by an early Christian. It is now known as *'the Epistle to Diognetus'*... was written way, way back nearly 1900 years ago...or 18 and a half centuries. This is what he says, "Christians are not marked out from the rest of mankind by their country or their speech or their customs. They dwell in cities both Greek and barbarian---each as his lot is cast---following the customs of the region, in clothing and food and in the ***OUTWARD*** things of life generally. Yet they manifest the wonderful and openly ***PARADOXICAL*** character of their ***OWN STATE***. They inhabit the land of their birth, but as ***TEMPORARY RESIDENTS*** thereof. They take all their share of responsibilities as ***CITIZENS*** and endure all disabilities as ALIENS. Every foreign land is their ***NATIVE*** land, and every native land is a ***FOREIGN*** land. They pass their days upon ***EARTH,*** but their citizenship is in ***HEAVEN***." Therefore, a letter to ***EXILES*** is so appropriate to you, and the word of advice is ***PRAY*** while you are in ***EXILE*** in the United Kingdom. ***PRAY*** the welfare of the United Kingdom is ***YOUR*** welfare as long as you're in it. That's why the New Testament commends us to lift up holy hands and to ***PRAY*** for those set an authority over us---the Prime Minister. Will you ***PRAY*** for him? We have had an acknowledgement from his private secretary to our letter of last week with its 900 signatures, but that is ***ALL*** we've had.

And you know, I verily believe that God guided us to send that letter and to send him the Word of God when we did, because that man is under such pressure now and making errors of judgment which could cost us everything. And he needs the ***WORD*** of God, and he needs to ***LISTEN*** to God. And my, how this week has shown it. Thank God that George Thomas, the Speaker, is a Christian. And in the middle of a debate just a few days ago, he called an MP over to him. The debate was getting a bit boring, and he called the MP over to him, and he said to that MP...what do you think he said? I was preaching at a rally just recently. And he said, "I made an appeal at the end." And he said, "Many people accepted Christ." And the MP went and sat down...in the middle of a boring debate! There was news like that going on in the House of Commons. Isn't that great? But we need far more people---Christians---in the House of Commons, far more. Pray that we may get up to the 5% needed to change the ***CHARACTER*** of our House of Commons. The number of Christian MPs at the moment---on all sides, in all parties--- is around 2%. That needs to be ***TRIPLED*** before the trends will reverse nationally.

So, you're in ***EXILE***, you don't belong to this United Kingdom; but *"In* ***ITS*** *welfare, lies* ***YOUR*** *welfare.* ***PRAY*** *for it.* ***BUILD*** *your houses, live in them;* ***PLANT*** *your gardens, eat their produce,"* but remember, don't ever get so rooted down in the United Kingdom that you're not ready to go ***HOME***. Expect to return to the ***PROMISED LAND***. Never get your roots so deep down in that house that you've built...in that garden that you've produced...or in your children...or your grandchildren, that you can't ***LEAVE*** it and go at a moment's notice to be with the Lord.

You see the letter to the exiles: *"And beware of the* ***FASLE*** *prophets who say smooth, easy things: 'It's all right, everything will turn out alright...It's only a little economic phase...we'll get through it…*we've muddled through before,’”…. Dunkirk, and all that*.* Don't ***BELIEVE*** it! Don't ***LISTEN*** to it! Here we have ***NO*** abiding city, and I believe God's hand of ***JUDGMENT*** is on this land. And until He's ***FULFILLED*** the intent of His mind, we can do nothing about it. But we can ***PRAY,*** and we can ***SUPPORT*** our government. It may not be the government you voted for at the last election, but, *“In* ***ITS*** *welfare, lies* ***YOUR*** *welfare.”* And if parliamentary democracy breaks down in this country, ***YOU*** will suffer, because ***YOU*** are in the United Kingdom. Jeremiah's letter to the exiles is so ***APPROPRIATE***. Go home and read it more. I have no time to say more about it.

***Chapter 30 Brings Consolation***

I want to get on to the other chapter, chapter 30. Now we have not a letter, but a ***BOOK***, and it's a book that lasts through to the end of chapter 33. And it's full of such ***GOOD NEWS*** that it's been called by scholars, ***'THE BOOK OF CONSOLATION'***. Jewish scholars say chapters 30 to 33 are the *'book of consolation'*. And we're ready for consolation. But my wife was at home this morning and was listening to a tape of Colin Urquhart, just to feed her own soul. And I just heard a glimpse the bedroom door of a few sentences that she was listening to and used it in a prayer before the service. Colin was saying this, "The ***WORD*** of God ***DIVIDES***, the ***SPIRIT*** of God ***UNITES***. The ***WORD*** of God ***WOUNDS***, the ***SPIRIT*** of God ***HEALS***. And the trouble is, we're all interested in the healing and the unity. We ***DON'T LIKE*** the wounding and the dividing. But where the ***WORD*** of God is preached, a church will be ***DIVIDED*** and then the ***SPIRIT*** will ***UNITE IT*** again. And this is God's ***SPIRITUAL SURGERY***. And it was necessary for us to go through chapters one to 28 which are doom and gloom---which ***HURT***, which ***CUT***, and which certainly got a lot of response...both positive and negative. I don't think I've ever had so many letters from people.

But we are now into the ***HEALING***, the ***CONSOLATION***, the ***LIFTING UP***, the Spirit ***HEALING*** the wounds. I divided this chapter into three parts again. It's good news, it's the gospel. And Jeremiah---though he is dead and gone---yet speaks, because he wrote it down in a ***BOOK*** 19 times. Actually, in this one chapter (I got the figure wrong earlier) ---19 times in this one chapter---God says, ***"I WILL."*** He said it 10 times in chapter 29. But now 19 times, God is ***MARRYING*** Himself to our future. "I will," "I will," "I will."

***Chapter 30 Divided into 3 Parts***

Now I divided it into ***THREE PARTS***. God is going to ***(1)*** remove their ***PANIC***. God is going to ***(2)*** remove their ***PAIN***. God is going to ***(3)*** remove their ***PRIVATION***; or, in the terms in which it's said in this chapter, ***(1)*** their ***TERRORS*** will be ended, ***(2)*** their ***WOUNDS*** will be healed, and ***(3)*** their ***FORTUNES*** restored.

***Part 1: Their Terrors Ended***

Note the three parts of the chapter---***FIRST*** of all, the ***TERRORS*** ended. Now I noticed something here that made me very excited. You know the Jews say there's only one God---they can't accept the trinity. I don't know how they managed to get around it. God said, "Let ***US*** make man in Our own image." And look up here, verse five, "Thus says the Lord, ***WE*** have heard," We!!! Only one God? Well, yes there is; but you know in the Hebrew it's, "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our ***GODS*** (plural form), The LORD is one." ***WE***!!!

*"Thus says the LORD, ‘****WE*** *have heard a panic,* ***TERROR****, no peace; a time of real distress when* *men are behaving like a woman having a child---in pain with pale face, sweat on their brow, trying to contain the pain. What's gone wrong when* ***MEN*** *do this? A time of* ***REAL DISTRESS****? Yes, Israel has been through* ***MORE*** *distress than any other nation on earth. Yet,’* says the Lord, *‘he will be* ***SAVED*** *out of it; and I will break the* ***YOKE****.’ "*

I've brought the yoke back again---or at least, Harold Wakeford has lent it to me again...a 250-year-old yoke. Do you know, God spoke more last Sunday through my wearing this, than anything I said. I really believe, you know? Because that's what Jeremiah did---he put it on. And at least one person in deep need in this congregation just cannot get this picture out of their minds and realize that God can break the ***CHAINS*** and break the ***YOKE***. Remember that that false prophet, Hananiah, broke it and said, *"Jeremiah, rubbish!"* And he (Hananiah) broke the ***WOODEN*** yoke. So, God said, *"I'll replace it with an* ***IRON*** *one."* See what Hananiah can do with ***THAT*** one. But ***GOD*** can break the ***IRON***! Iron gates can ***YIELD***; and brass is just ***BROKEN*** before God. And God says, *"I'll take that* ***YOKE****, and I'll take it off; and I'll* ***SMASH*** *it."* Why? In order that they may be ***FREE***? No. I told you last week---and if you weren't here last week, let me repeat it, because it's repeated here. *"I will* ***BREAK*** *your yoke in order that you may* ***SERVE THE LORD****."* There's no such thing as freedom in this world. You either serve ***YOURSELF***, or ***SOMEONE ELSE***, or ***GOD***. And there's only one whose service is perfect ***FEEDOM***---and it's not yourself. That is the ***WORST*** kind of slavery: to be a slave to yourself and to have the ***YOKE*** of your own ***PRIDE*** and ***GREED*** bearing you down. But God can ***BREAK*** ***THAT*** yoke, and he can ***BREAK*** also the yoke of ***BABYLON*** or the yoke of whatever foreign power. He can break ***THAT*** yoke.

But He does it in order that He may put ***ANOTHER*** yoke on your shoulders, and that you may ***BEND*** that stiff neck of yours to a ***YOKE*** that is ***EASY*** and a ***BURDEN*** that is ***LIGHT***. That's why God said to Pharaoh, *"Let my people go that they may be free."* ***NO***, he ***DIDN'T*** say that. He said, *"Let my people go, that they may* ***SERVE ME****."* And God only ***FREES*** you that you may be ***ENSLAVED*** to Him. And that's why Paul called himself, *"A bondslave of the Lord Jesus."* He'd been a slave to the ***LAW***, a slave to ***SELF***. Now he was a bondslave to ***JESUS***.

The ***ONLY*** ***QUESTION*** that is before mankind is, "***WHOSE SLAVE*** are you gonna be?" There's no point in talking about ***FREEDOM***. The question is, "***WHOSE SLAVE*** are you going to be.' You will either be your own slave, or someone else's, or Gods." And God says, *"I'm going to* ***BREAK*** *your* ***YOKE****. The fear will go. And when you're serving* ***ME*** *and David your* ***KING****---when you're doing that---then none will make you afraid. And everyone who oppresses you, I will oppress."* And then God says this (and I want you to notice because it seals the ***DOOM*** of the United Kingdom!): *"Any nation,*" he says*..."****ALL THE NATIONS*** *that have* ***TROUBLED*** *you...all the nations that have troubled you...I will bring to a* ***FULL END****. But YOU, I will* ***NEVER*** *make a full end of you."*

And on the basis of that, and on the basis of the muddle that the British got into when we had the trusteeship of ***PALESTINE*** and the ***JEWS***---on that basis---I say very simply, "The days of the United Kingdom are ***FINISHED***." They are already numbered, because God says, "I'll make a full end of ***ALL THE NATIONS*** that cause you ***TROUBLE***." And we have done so, not least by our ***FOLLY*** after World War I in making the same ***PROMISE*** to both ***JEW*** and ***ARAB***, that they could ***BOTH*** have the land!

And when we got into a ***MESS*** as the result of that two-faced promise, we just got out and left it to the United Nations. I know it cost us lives of our boys. I know we tried to be fair. I know we tried to do what we could, but we made a ***MESS*** of it as a nation. And God has written our ***DOOM*** in that. I'm not telling you ***WHEN*** it will be, but he said*, "I will make a* ***FULL END****...a full end of all the nations that* ***TROUBLE*** *you. But of* ***YOU****, I'll* ***NEVER*** *make a full end."* So, I make this prediction that on the last day of human history, there will be a nation called ***ISRAEL***. But I don't know what ***OTHER NATIONS*** there'll be.

So, ***"Your TERROR, your FEAR."*** And how they have ***FEARED*** going through that museum of the Holocaust in Jerusalem in silence, seeing the photographs of old men, naked women, and little children---faces filled with ***FEAR***. Here is God saying in this book for the future for them, *"****NONE*** *will make you afraid. No more* ***PANIC****...no more panic."* And that museum in Jerusalem is just filled with ***PANIC*** and ***FEAR***. And there'll be ***NO MORE***.

***Part 2: Their Pain Ended***

Now the ***SECOND*** thing that will be taken away is all that ***PAIN***. All that pain. It's a deep pain. The ***MEDICAL*** language is used now from verse 12 onwards. *"Your* ***HURT*** *is incurable. Your* ***WOUND*** *is grievous. There's no* ***MEDICINE*** *for your* ***WOUND****, no* ***HEALING****. Why'd you cry out over your* ***HURT****, your* ***HEALTH****, your* ***WOUNDS****?"* It's ***MEDICAL*** terms. But what is the ***WOUND***??? What is ***HURTING***? I don't think it's the ***PHYSICAL***, suffering because they didn't have much in the early days in Babylon---they lived in comparative physical comfort. The ***HURT*** is that they'd ***LOST THEIR*** ***LAND***. They were far from home, and they couldn't go back. And God says, *"Look, your* ***HURT*** *at the human level is incurable, because your* ***GUILT*** *is great. Your* ***SINS*** *are flagrant. Don't you realize that your* ***SICKNESS*** *is due to your* ***SIN****?"* There is a ***CONNECTION*** between those two things---not in every case---but there can be a connection. And you can be ***SICK*** because you are ***SINNING***. Body and soul are too intimately bound up, for you to be able to do things with your ***SOUL***, and not suffer in your ***BODY***; and not do things to your ***BODY***, and not suffer in your ***SOUL***. *"You're one being; and your* ***SICKNESS*** *is very great, and it's incurable; and you'll never get this* ***HURT*** *out of your soul."*

And then God says, *"What is* ***IMPOSSIBLE****, I can do. I'll* ***HEAL*** *your incurable wounds."* Do you know there are many of you listening to my voice who've got wounds in your ***SPIRIT***? Some of them go back to your childhood, some of them go back just a few years, some may even have been caused this week. There are ***WOUNDS***, and when somebody else touches them, they ***HURT***. There are ***HURTS*** and they limit your Christian ***SERVICE***, and they spoil your ***FREEDOM*** in the Lord. They're ***HURTS***, they’re ***WOUNDS***. And you say*, "They're* ***INCURABLE****. I'm too old. I've had it too long, and I'll never get over it."* That's what we say. And God says, *"Listen, I will* ***RESTORE*** *health to you. And your wounds I will* ***HEAL****---all the hurts there have been."* That's a lovely promise, isn't it? ***WHY*** will God do this? Look: *"Because they have called you an* ***OUTCAST*** *and said, 'It is Zion for whom no one* ***CARES****.' "* And, you know, that hurts ***GOD***. That touches him on a very sensitive point, because ***GOD CARES MORE*** than anyone else. And for anyone to say He doesn't care for his people really gets God on the roar. And God says, *"I will* ***HEAL*** *the incurable wound, because I do not want anybody saying about you, ‘No one cares for that person.’ "* I find that very touching. And so, if you've got a ***WOUND***, take it to the Lord. If you've got a ***HURT***, take it to the Lord. Because if you keep it, somebody could say, *"No one cares."* And God says, *"I care. And so, I'm gonna remove your pain."*

***Part 3: Their Privation Ended***

And then ***FINALLY***, ***(3)*** their ***PRIVATION***. And here we have a lovely picture of ***STABLE PROSPERITY***. Oh, it's thrilling to read! A ***CITY*** rebuilt. A ***PALACE*** in the city. ***CHILDREN*** playing around in the streets. Songs, music, dancing, making merry and ***EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL***. A lovely city to live in---a kind of garden suburb with plenty of playground for the children; and the old folk looking on... and do you catch the vision? It's a lovely picture economically, culturally, politically, socially, ***EVERYTHING PUT RIGHT.*** *"I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob."*

And the climax comes in verse 21. *"They will be ruled over by someone from among themselves, yet someone who will be able to* ***APPROACH GOD****."* Now that's the kind of ruler we need, isn't it? We need someone we feel is one of us, that we can identify with, that we can say, "Well, he's like us; and we need somebody who can get close to God." Listen: *"The prince (their prince) shall be* ***ONE OF THEMSELVES.*** *Their rulers shall come out of their midst."* You know the Jews have had too many rulers from ***OUTSIDE*** themselves. They've been ruled over by Syria, by Egypt, by Greece, by Rome. Wherever they've been dispersed as exiles, they've been ruled over by an alien. Only ***ONE*** English prime minister has been Jewish. That was Benjamin Israeli. Otherwise, the Jews in this country have been ruled over by a ***GENTILE***. The Jews in America are ruled over by GENTILES. *"You will have a prince, one of yourselves."* You know ***WHO*** that's referring to, don't you?

And the climax comes: *"And* ***YOU*** *will be* ***MY*** *people, and* ***I WILL BE YOUR GOD****.”* It's the ***BEST THING*** about the city. Not that there are children with plenty of playgrounds; not that there are palaces and fine buildings; not that there's peace and prosperity and security; but that at the heart of it, ***GOD IS RELATING TO HIS PEOPLE***. You notice there's ***NO TEMPLE*** mentioned here, did you? No temple. If you've got God, you can do ***WITHOUT*** a temple. And you know that these very words are taken from Jeremiah 30 and taken straight through to the ***END*** of the Bible.

Let me now ***APPLY*** chapter 30 to you. As chapter 29 is appropriate to you (Because, if you're a Christian, you're an ***EXILE***, an alien. You don't belong here. Your citizenship is elsewhere. And therefore, ***PRAY*** for this land. Its welfare is your welfare; but never get so involved in it that you can't ***LEAVE*** it. Look for the ***RETURN***. You are exiled.)

***Chapter 30: Setting Our Eyes Toward Home***

But ***NOW*** let me apply chapter 30: You are one day going ***HOME***. And there's a ***CITY*** whose streets you cannot imagine for beauty. And that city is described in the last two pages of the Bible (Chapters 21, 22 of book of Revelation), and it's described there. And there is NO temple in the city. Why? Because God says, "***I WILL BE YOUR GOD AND YOU WILL BE MY PEOPLE***." Same words. That's what makes society stable and peaceful and prosperous. We cannot solve our economic problems with an economic policy. Jesus said, *"Seek* ***FIRST*** *the kingdom of God. And all these things will look after themselves."* When in the middle of social life there is a ***RELATIONSHIP*** between God and the people, then and ***ONLY THEN***, will our other problems get sorted out. There are those who will say, "That's over simplistic. Let's put **YOU** in Downing Street and see what **YOU** could do." No, I wouldn't go. I'll never be asked. But I believe that there is need for ***POLITICIANS***...and I'm not a politician. And I pray that God will raise up Christian politicians from this congregation who will be ***SKILLED*** at politics, but who will be men who ***START*** from their relationship with God. And then ***WORK IT OUT*** politically, as I have to work it out in the church. Let them work it out in the House of Commons......as all of us have to work it out where we work and where we live.

***Tribulation Before Glory***

Now comes the ***SHOCK***. And I'm afraid it is a shock: Verses 22 to 24, after this lovely picture of panic ***REMOVED***, pain ***GONE***, privations ***ENDED***. After that lovely ***PICTURE*** and that ***CLIMAX***: *"You will be My people and I will be your God,"* we get three verses full of God's ***WRATH*** and ***ANGER***. Just don't get it, do you? What a shock. I wish I could have stopped at verse 22. Lovely preacher's climax, isn't it? But the Bible is an ***HONEST*** book. And it goes on to say, *"Before you can have that* ***STABLE PROSPERITY****, there will be a* ***STORMY PRELUDE****. There will be an exhibition of God's* ***WRATH*** *and* ***ANGER*** *such as has never been seen before, a whirling* ***TEMPEST****, a storm."* And the chapter finishes with these words: *"You may* ***NOT*** *understand it* ***NOW****, but in the latter days* ***YOU******WILL****...you will."*

And the book of ***REVELATION*** is not only the book that describes that ***NEW JERUSALEM*** (that beautiful city that we're all gonna live in); the book of Revelation is full of God's ***ANGER*** and ***WRATH***. Have you noticed that? Because I'm afraid God must fulfill His anger and wrath BEFORE He can bring us to that city. "And there will be a time of ***DISTRESS***---not only for Jacob, but for ***ALL NATIONS***."

*"It is through great* ***TRIBULATION*** *that we enter the kingdom."* And I believe we Christians have to be utterly ***REALISTIC***. The day of ***WRATH*** has to come ***BEFORE*** the day of God's ***GLORY***.

It is true of Israel as a nation. Have you noticed that for the first time Jeremiah is no longer calling them Jerusalem or Judah. He is calling them ‘***JACOB*’**. He's not done that before. But all through chapter 30 he says, "*Jacob*," "*Jacob*," "*Jacob*." Why ***JACOB***? Because Jerusalem and Judah are only ***PART*** of the nation. The word Jacob covers all 12 tribes because he was the ***FATHER*** of the 12. And He's saying, *"Now this future is for the* ***WHOLE*** *of Israel."* People debate as to where the 10 lost tribes are. I tell you, God hasn't lost them... God hasn't lost them. And this future is for ***ALL*** 12 tribes.

And so, it's the future of ***JACOB***. But Jacob must go through a time of ***DISTRESS*** and God's ***WRATH*** before that future. And every time I go to Israel today, I come back with my heart breaking and thinking, "When will it happen to them?" You see, they've come back to the ***LAND***, but not to the ***LORD***. And that plea, *"If, with* ***ALL YOUR HEART,*** *you truly* ***SEEK******ME****,"* is still ***NOT*** responded to by the tribes of Israel. They're still not turning to Him with all their hearts. And so, there must be a time of distress for Jacob, yet he will be ***SAVED*** out of it.

***There Is a Reference to Jesus***

My ***LAST WORD*** is this. Not only is there a name *'Jacob'* first used in this chapter, there's ***ANOTHER*** name that's in this chapter. It isn't actually in print, but it's there. It's the name ***'JESUS'***. He wasn't given that name in Jeremiah's day, so it isn't used. But what is used is: *"I will break your yoke, that you may serve the Lord, and* ***DAVID, THEIR KING****."* But David, the king, had already been ***DEAD*** 400 years (more.... 600 years!!!); he was dead and gone. *"You will serve the Lord, and David, your king.”* They would understand what that meant. It meant a ***DESCENDENT*** of the royal line of David. And when it talks about, *"A* ***PRINCE*** *who will come out from among you, one of yourselves; and yet who will approach God,"* we've got a ***PERFECT PICTURE OF JESUS***: born in Bethlehem, born in human frame, one of us, one of ourselves!! Even we ***GENTILES*** can say that! "Very man of very man." *"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."* He was from ourselves, and yet He is approaching the throne of God so closely (more closely than any man would dare to approach God). And that gives us ***OUR PRINCE***. And the future of ***JACOB*** and the future of ***JESUS*** are not two futures, just ***ONE***. The future of ***JEW*** and ***GENTILE*** are not two futures, but ***ONE***. ***THEIR*** distress is ***OUR*** distress. And we are the ***OTHER SHEEP*** that were not of that fold, whom Jesus has brought. And there will be ONE flock, ***ONE*** fold, ***ONE*** Shepherd. And Jew and Gentile together will enter into this glorious future. ***IF***...***IF*** with ***ALL*** our hearts we truly ***SEEK*** him.

***HALFHEARTED*** people make Jesus ***SICK***. He would rather they were cold than lukewarm. But ***WHOLEHEARTED*** people not only ***FIND*** God, they are ***FOUND BY*** God, which is even ***BETTER*** ....'cause God is looking for them. He came to ***SEEK*** and to ***SAVE***. And you will be ***FOUND*** by Him.

And then, *"I've made* ***PLANS*** *for your* ***WELFARE****."* So, who's for the welfare state of God? By the grace of God, ***WE ARE***! And we have no abiding city. And our citizenship is ***THERE***. And we're ***ALIENS*** here! We'll support our (***EARTHLY***) kingdom; for in its welfare, lies our welfare. But we are not so deeply rooted here, that God couldn't call us at a moment's notice to go ***HOME***.

Let us ***PRAY***. *"Father, thank you for speaking to us through Your word---written so long ago, yet so alive and so relevant. And we pray now, that as we come and respond to that word in worship, that there may be nothing halfhearted about us; but that we may search for you with all our hearts and be found of you and have a hope and a future that nothing can dim or take away. So, Lord, we praise Your name, that You break the Yoke. Our chains fell off. Our heart was free. We rose, went forth and followed Thee! Amen."*

***Singing***