



World Day of Prayer

Prepared by the WDP Committee of England, Wales and Northern Ireland

March 4, 2022

“I Know the Plans I Have for You”

Bible Study - Jeremiah 29:1-14

PREPARATION

The Bible Study is designed to be a creative group conversation. Read the section **CREATIVE WAYS OF READING, LISTENING AND REFLECTING** to choose the group exercise to be used and prepare beforehand the materials, for example: puppets, scenery, background music, Biblical map and current global map, photos of situation that can be perceived as experiences of exile.

Read the section **A WORD ON GOD OUR MOTHER AND OUR FATHER** in the Worship Service to be aware of the context for the opening prayer.

OPENING PRAYER

God, our Mother and our Father, we come to you today to study your true word. We declare we are open to hear from you and to accept your good plans for our lives. We love you and thank you for your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

SETTING THE SCENE

The seventh century BC was a period of great turmoil for Israel, Judah and the surrounding nations. The brutal Assyrian Empire, which had brought the kingdom of Israel to its knees, was failing. In its place, the powerful Babylonians were gaining influence. It was into this very unstable world that Jeremiah was born, around 650BC. His prophetic calling came around 627BC. God had chosen him while he was still in the womb and he was to be appointed as a prophet to the nations. Young Jeremiah felt ill-equipped for so great a task, but God touched his lips and assured him of his powerful presence (Jeremiah 1:4-10). His ministry proved to be very demanding and required great courage. It involved imprisonment and hardship. The Bible passage chosen for our World Day of Prayer service shows the fierce opposition that Jeremiah had to face.

The book of Jeremiah was written around the time of the Judean exile in Babylon (modern-day Iraq). Judah had been conquered and their holy city of Jerusalem lay in ruins. Their temple - the place they believed God to reside - had been destroyed. An elite community of the people of Judah - the king and queen mother, the leaders, nobility and craftsmen - had been carried off into exile. Their future looked bleak. Psalm 137 shows their desperate homesickness and longing to return eventually to Jerusalem. Without their temple, they could not offer sacrifices – a practice which was an integral part of their faith.

READ Jeremiah 29:1-14

CREATIVE WAYS OF READING, LISTENING AND REFLECTING

- Read the passage from Jeremiah aloud twice or even three times, very slowly. After each reading, silently reflect upon the verses and spend a few minutes listening to God. In this way, you will allow the Word of God to flow into your heart and mind.
- Dramatise the reading, maybe by using puppets and basic scenery and playing background music.

- Look at a map of the geographical area of Babylon and Jerusalem in biblical times and in the 21st century. Identify the journey taken by the exiles. Draw a map to represent your life journey and trace God's plans throughout. Share your hopes for your own life and that of your church and community.
- Look at photos representing forms of exile. Try to imagine what it feels like to be exiled from the community, if you were for example a refugee, a prisoner, an elderly, an unemployed, a lonely or a homeless person. Choose one situation that may resonate with you and say why.

Our chosen passage is part of a letter that contains God's message to Jeremiah for the exiles. Jeremiah exhorted the exiles to build houses, plant gardens, have a family and seek the welfare of the city, where God had sent them to live. God also alerted them not to listen to false prophets and diviners who were promising that they would soon be returning home. God's message was clear: pray on behalf of the city that you live in, seek their welfare and you will find your welfare. Jeremiah urged them to accept their current situation, and be prepared to settle down.

Questions for you to think about and share:

- How do you think the exiles reacted to the news that they must be prepared to settle in a foreign land? What would your reaction have been?
- What were the conditions they had to follow before they could return home? How would you have felt after hearing about God's plans?

After the exhortation, a promise! I know the plans I have for you. God had not forgotten his promise to bring the people back to their own land, but it would be 70 years before this would be accomplished. Seven years would have seemed a long time to most, but 70? The exiles' dreams must have been shattered with the reading of this letter. Many would have felt without hope. After so many years, it would be the next generation going home to Judah!

Hope and a future

God's words *did* contain hope. For their part, the people of Judah had to rebuild their relationship with God that had been broken through sin and disobedience to his commandments. When they searched for God earnestly through prayer and worship, they would find him. He also wanted them to build a relationship with the local inhabitants. They would achieve this in community and through prayerful action. Their time of waiting in Babylon would be difficult and frustrating, however, when this time was over their future would be restored and their families could return to their homeland, as God had promised.

Hope for today's world

Across today's world, millions of people are in exile, having left their countries because of war, persecution, fear and hunger. Others are on a dangerous and difficult journey to what they hope will be a place of safety. For so many there is little possibility that they will be able to return home in the near future.

Questions for you to think about and share

- Is it possible for someone to feel that they are in a kind of exile, even if they are safe in their own country?
- How do we pray with those experiencing exile and maybe help them? How can we bring hope to people in situations from which they feel there is no way out?

PRAYERFUL ACTION

Jeremiah's letter exposed the political and social tensions of his time, but also a promise to guide them to their future: I know the plans I have for you. We need to work towards a society where there is justice for all, especially for those who are the most vulnerable. Across the world we need to work together to address the big problems we face, such as global warming, poverty, diseases, forced migration, refugee crisis or lack of love with whom we disagree. We believe that God has plans for each of us, plans for good and not for harm. It is our turn to put in actions our hope for the future. God is always with us, even when it may be difficult to understand.

Listen to a story of prayerful action. The full version of the story is in the Children's and Youth Programme.

I am Grace. I'm 24. My hope is...that all those who seek safety in the UK are welcomed, embraced, and given the support they need. When the news in the UK began to fill with stories of people crossing the Mediterranean in dinghies and risking their lives to reach Europe, I couldn't ignore it. My heart broke that people had been forced to flee their homes and were risking their lives to reach our continent.

My God is a God of justice and this was a serious and harmful injustice that was happening on my doorstep. In September 2017, I moved to Calais to volunteer with the Refugee Community Kitchen. I ended up staying for 6 months, working as a driver and distribution lead. God gave me an amazing support network – both in Calais and from home. I think people found hope in friendship.

- Grace's #WDP hope is for refugees. What's your WDP hope?
- Grace was passionate about restoring worth to refugees and her passion led her to serve in a practical way. What steps can you take this week which will help transform an injustice?
- We want to create a movement of passionate hope-bringers across the world. Share an issue that you're passionate about by writing it on a piece of paper, sharing it with the group, and then uploading it on social media using #WDP hope.

May we be inspired by this reading from Jeremiah to trust that ultimately God will bring a perfect plan to fruition in our lives. We pray that God, our Mother and our Father, will use us to help others when life seems too great a struggle.

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