

BRINGERS OF PEACE

JEREMIAH'S LETTER TO THE EXILES FOR TODAY

We are the bringers of peace. Are we bringing it to our world?



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A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Bringers of Peace
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Welcome to *Bringers of Peace*

Isaiah prophesied that the Kingdom of God would come and bring increasing peace to the world.

Is this what we see in our day?

And if not, have we tried to analyze why this is so?

Wisdom and counsel can be found in Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon. His instructions for them ring true for us today, as we take up our callings to the Kingdom and glory of God, to live as witnesses to Christ and ambassadors of His Kingdom.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Never So Bad

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon... Jeremiah 29.4

As bad as it gets?

How bad could things get?

Their capital city had surrendered to a powerful enemy, who had destroyed their temple, razed most of the city, installed a puppet government, deported the most productive of the citizens, and put those who remained under a severe tribute.

But those who were still living in Jerusalem, under the strong hand of Nebuchadnezzar, at least considered themselves better off than those who had been sent into exile in Babylon. They must have felt this way, for even when Jeremiah urged them to yield to the Babylonian king and go peaceably with him to captivity, they refused, insisting on fleeing to Egypt instead.

In their minds, going to Babylon was surely as bad as things could get, and they wanted nothing of it. The remnant left behind in Judah preferred the misery of ruined Jerusalem or the uncertainty of far-off Egypt to being servants of the Babylonian king.

Subjugation in Babylon was humiliating and demeaning. Precisely as God intended.

Looking for a little peace

In different periods of Church history, members of the believing community, seeing the corruption and hypocrisy of their age, have withdrawn or separated from the conditions of the day, seeking to carve out a space of peace for themselves away from it all.

The spiritualists who fled to the deserts in the third and fourth century wanted nothing to do with the doctrinal wars and political compromises of the established Church. They holed up in the deserts, as individuals or in isolated communities, hoping to keep themselves unstained from the world, while they waited for the arrival of a better day.

The various religious orders that sprang up during the late Middle Ages separated themselves from normal life in the Church, seeking to create communities of the sanctified, and to distance themselves from the ecclesiastical pomp and degradation they saw on every hand.

During the Reformation, Martin Luther insisted that the Church had fallen under a kind of “Babylonian captivity,” and was desperately in need of reform. Ultimately, he would lead large segments of European Christians to break away from the Roman Church, only to end up fighting among themselves and fracturing the Body of Christ even further.

Within the Protestant movement, certain Anabaptist leaders went even further, and walled themselves and their followers off in cities, in a vain attempt to fend off what they regarded as the wickedness all around. They pronounced a curse on both houses of the European Church – Roman and Protestant – and then proceeded to sponsor their own schisms and upheavals.

Even in our day some believers, seeing the wickedness on every hand around us, have chosen to withdraw from the world – its culture, society, and institutions – and to keep to themselves in holy enclaves, where a strict legalism reinforces their negating posture toward all things “worldly.” There they hope to realize a

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modicum of peace in an age of upheaval and uncertainty. Other Christians have made their peace with our materialistic and sensual age, and practice their faith in a manner largely indistinguishable from the surrounding world.

Always the people of God

The people of Jerusalem whom Nebuchadnezzar took captive to Babylon may have been tempted to agree with the assessment of their contemporaries: Living in Babylon is about as bad as it can get. They must have wondered aloud concerning what they would do, how they would live, and by what means they would manage to keep themselves separate from and untainted by their pagan neighbors and oppressors. Certainly, they harbored ill feelings toward their captors, and they must have felt fear and revulsion toward them. The less they had to do with these people, the better. Doing anything to *bless* the Babylonians was doubtless the furthest thing from their minds.

But as Jeremiah would explain in the letter he wrote to the captives in Babylon, conditions are never so bad that the people of God can simply forget their calling, deny their mission, set aside their mandate, circle their wagons, and hold on, hoping for the best, against the corruption and wickedness on every hand.

For the people of God never cease to be the people of God, no matter how bad it gets; and things can never get so bad that the Church cannot make a powerful impact for grace and truth – if only we are faithful and obedient to our calling from the Lord.

And you and I, as members of the divine household in our day, never cease having been sent into the world as agents and ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. As such, we are called to be bringers of peace, beginning in our own Personal Mission Field.

For reflection

1. What does it mean to be a bringer of peace to your Personal Mission Field?
2. Jesus said He is sending us into the world in the same way He was sent (Jn. 20.21). Why was Jesus sent to the world, and what are the implications of this for you?
3. Jesus used images of salt, light, and leaven to describe His followers. How do these images direct you to think about your Personal Mission Field?

Next steps – Preparation: Have you mapped out your Personal Mission Field? [Watch this brief video](#), then download the Personal Mission Field worksheet, and get started being a bringer of peace to your world.

2 Focus on the Promises

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29.11

The new normal?

We are becoming so accustomed to the forsaking of traditional values, the undermining and fragmenting of long-established institutions, and the breakdown of morality and civility that we can begin to think that these conditions are the new normal, the best we can hope for in an age in flight from God.

Everywhere we look in our day, the prophetic words of William Butler Yeats, in his 1919 poem, “The Second Coming,” seem to be coming true: “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;/Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world./The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere/the ceremony of innocence is drowned.”

But the appearances, which press upon us daily, are only a matter of perspective. As a friend once reminded me, a penny is a very small thing – until you hold it right up next to your eye. In the same way, many believers today spend so much time analyzing, criticizing, and condemning the broken conditions of our hapless, hopeless world that they have lost sight of the larger reality within which those conditions are occurring.

That larger reality is unfolding according to the promises and Kingdom of God.

The people of Jerusalem, carried off to captivity by King Nebuchadnezzar, were in danger of making a similar mistake. But Jeremiah understood that they needed to keep a proper perspective on their situation, and the way to do that was by focusing on and striving toward the exceedingly great and precious promises of God.

The promises of God

Peter reminded a community of persecuted believers, mid-way through the first century, that their circumstances were not so bad as to cancel the promises of God. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, and nothing but our own unbelief can deprive us of the full and abundant life God intends. In Jesus Christ, our Lord holds out “exceedingly great and precious promises,” Peter explained, so that by these promises, leaving the corruption of the world behind us, we partake of the very essence of the divine King Himself (2 Pet. 1.4)!

In the same way, Jeremiah counseled the Jews in captivity to remember the thoughts of God, the divine plan, first spoken to Abraham, reinforced through Moses, and broadened under King David, in which God determined to redeem a people for Himself and to bless them so that they, in turn, could be a blessing to all the nations.

God promised to give Himself to His people, so that, in fellowship with Him they could know fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16.11). He promised to make them a great nation, who, by their righteousness, wisdom, and love for one another would be the envy of all the surrounding nations (Deut. 4.1-8). And He promised to send a great King to shepherd them, so that they could realize all the promises of God’s great and glorious plan for increasing righteousness and peace (Gen. 49.8-11; Is. 9.6, 7).

By focusing on these precious and very great promises, the exiled people of Jerusalem would find a proper orientation for understanding their times, and the right means and incentive to know the outworking of God’s plan for their lives.

By focusing on those same promises, we can bring the reality of God’s own presence and peace into our Personal Mission Fields.

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Right where you are

Today, when things are falling apart all around us, when the center of Western civilization seems to be coming unglued, and anarchy and violence threaten on every hand, the followers of Jesus Christ must not lose sight of the promises of God. God has great plans for us, plans to bless us, and to make us a blessing. Plans to bring righteousness and peace into the world. Plans for revival, renewal, and awakening on a grand scale.

And the unfolding of God's thoughts and plans begins right where we are, in the social and cultural arenas we travel, and with the people to whom Jesus sends us each day. We must not allow the unraveling times in which we live to obscure our vision of what God has promised. We must daily focus on those exceedingly great and precious promises, and strive toward their realization in all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

The world can never get so bad, or our conditions so unfavorable, that the promises of God cease being true, and within reach. We must live toward the promises, challenging on every hand the cynicism, doubt, skepticism, and materialism of our day, for if we do, God will surely bless us and make us a blessing to our sad and weary world.

For reflection

1. Peter says God holds out to us exceedingly great and precious promises. What are those promises?
2. What does it mean to "live toward" those promises?
3. How would you expect to see God's promise of increasing righteousness and peace come to expression in your Personal Mission Field?

Next step – Preparation: Find a prayer partner who will agree to pray with you about living toward the promises of God more consistently day by day.

3 Seek the Lord

“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD...”
Jeremiah 29.13, 14

The choice

In exile from their beloved promised land, the people of Jerusalem had a choice: they could either moan and lament for their condition of chastisement and exile, and live in withdrawal and fear; or they could look to the promises of God, and let that be the horizon which defined their journey during this season of captivity in Babylon.

However bad it may have been under Nebuchadnezzar’s boot, the promises of God had not changed, and they would not fail. He would remain steadfast in His love, and faithful to His Word. He waited to bless the people of Israel with revival and renewal in their relationship with Him, so that they could be ready to bless their world with the gift of His Son.

Israel’s hope, and the resolve and strength such hope engenders, depended on their ability to keep their eyes on the promises of God, especially in the midst of their difficult trial. They could choose to seek the Lord, and find Him and His promises with new vigor and power, or they could simply hunker down, play at religion, and hope for the best. The choice was theirs.

And ours.

The duty to seek

With their eyes firmly fixed on the promises, Israel now had a second duty. God commanded His people to *seek* Him, promising that, if they would do so with all their hearts, He would be found by them, and would restore to them His blessings.

This must have puzzled the people of Israel, as they read these words from Jeremiah in the midst of their captivity in Babylon. Wasn’t God dwelling in Jerusalem? In the temple He had commanded them to build? Which Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed? How could they expect to find God so far away from home?

But the exiles who truly knew the Lord – like Daniel, for instance – understood that the temple was not the only, or even the primary place where God could be found. When Daniel needed the presence of the Lord, for strength to seek the peace of the Babylonian Empire, he knew that the Lord was as near to hand. Daniel turned to Him in earnest prayer and faithful reading and meditation in the Word of God.

Seeking the Lord

With Daniel, we get a glimpse of how one faithful believer sought God with his whole heart in prayer. In Daniel 2 and 4, faced by crises and threats, Daniel went to the Lord in prayer. We see him praying earnestly on his own, enlisting his friends to help him in prayer, and praying every day, three times a day, seeking the Lord as often as he could for strength to serve Him well.

In chapter nine, Daniel again turned to prayer, but this time in response to his reading of the same book of Jeremiah that we are considering all this week. As Daniel read in the scroll of Jeremiah, seeking the Lord and His will, he discovered in Jeremiah 25 that Israel was to be returned to the land after seventy years of captivity. He must have tallied up the years he’d been in Babylon and realized that the time had come. Now in earnest prayers of confession and pleading, Daniel sought the Lord to fulfill all that He had promised.

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This is the way to gain the Lord's presence and His promises, when we turn to Him in faithful reading and study of His Word and diligent, earnest prayer.

God promised Israel that He would be found by them when they sought Him consistently like this. Daniel realized that it was so; it remains so for us today. As we strive to know the promised blessings of the Lord in the midst of an increasingly hostile age, we must commit to seeking Him – in His Word and prayer – more fervently and consistently than ever before. God promises that, if we will, we will find Him, and in finding Him, find the strength we need to serve Him faithfully, right where we are.

How is it with you? As you go forth into your Personal Mission Field each day, sent like Jesus to bring peace to the world, have you prepared well by coming into God's presence in prayer and meditation? Do you bring before Him the people you will see that day, seeking His guidance for how you might be a blessing to them? Do you search His Word for guidance and wisdom to live as salt, light, and leaven in our sad and dreary world?

In a world of darkness and unbelief, you can simply try to avoid as much as you can of its wickedness, corruption, and sorrow. Or you can live like Daniel, daily seeking the Lord, living toward the promises of God, and bringing His peace into all the places and people of your life.

For reflection

1. How would you describe your present practice of seeking the Lord? Do you see any ways this could be improved?
2. Do you pray for the people in your Personal Mission Field? How do you pray?
3. Do you try to find something from God's presence each day to take with you into your Personal Mission Field? Can you give an example?

Next steps – Preparation: Begin praying daily for the people in your Personal Mission Field. Let God's Word lead you each day concerning what you should pray.

4 Build up the Community

“Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished.” Jeremiah 29.6

A spiritual core

Fulfilling our calling as the salt of the earth and the light of the world begins within, in the depths of our souls, where we keep our eyes steadfastly fixed on the promises of God; and in our practice of spiritual disciplines, as we bend our knees and hearts to seek Him in His Word and prayer, day by day.

Without a solid and secure spiritual core to their lives and communities, the exiles from Jerusalem would not have the stamina to endure the hardship they would know in Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon. Similarly, we will make no progress in knowing the blessings of God and being a blessing to the people in our Personal Mission Field, unless we devote ourselves daily and earnestly to strengthening our souls in the Lord.

The life of faith begins in the *mind*, in how you see and understand your world; and in the *heart*, in the kind of attitudes and affections you nurture there; and in your *conscience*, where you train your will to will what God wills. With your soul thus set like flint on the things of the Lord, the words and deeds that fill your Personal Mission Field each day will be more likely to bring the peace, joy, and knowledge of Jesus to your world.

A third command

With this foundation established for the exiles in Babylon, the Lord through Jeremiah gave a third command to His people. They must not allow their time in captivity to cause the numbers of the people of God to decline. Rather, they must work to build-up the community of God’s people through giving their sons and daughters in marriage and raising sons and daughters to know the promises of God, and to seek Him with their parents.

God’s command was clear: Israel must *increase* in captivity in Babylon, even as bad as conditions may have been in some places; they must not allow the ranks of the people of God to decline.

Here is yet another sound word of instruction for the Church in our secular and materialistic age. We must work hard to *increase* the ranks of the followers of Jesus Christ. Increasing the community of Christ’s disciples has two facets.

Two facets

First, Christians must not follow the fashion of the times which depreciates marriage and child-rearing in favor of a life of getting and spending. God has called us to be fruitful and multiply in every age; no amount of economic opportunity or ambition must be allowed to get in the way of this most important mandate.

And the children we bring into this world, we must raise diligently, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We must eschew all that is merely frivolous and trivial in Christian education, and raise our children as citizens and ambassadors in the Kingdom of God, called to live for His glory as witnesses for Jesus Christ in every area of their lives. Even children have a Personal Mission Field, and it is the duty of parents and churches to teach them how to seek the Lord and His Kingdom in their designated spheres.

In addition, the Church today needs to rediscover the work of evangelism. We have become so used to thinking of the lost as “seekers,” and doing everything we can think of in our churches to attract them to us, that we have forgotten, or at least, minimized, the mandate to make disciples as we are going, in the everyday situations of our lives. The concept of Personal Mission Field is for most contemporary Christians *terra incognita*; however, for Jesus and Paul, it was just the normal Christian life, in which we are to live as witness to

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Christ for the glory of God in all things (Acts 1.8; 1 Cor. 10.31).

The world is not commanded to go to church; but the Church is commanded to go to the world, and this is a form of ministry that has fallen by the wayside in too many churches today. Every believer is called to seek the peace and edification of the people to whom God has sent him, and by this means, to build up the community of believers, so that it increases, and does not decrease.

Nationally, the percentage of the population claiming to be Christians is declining annually. Surely we can see that this is not the will of God for His churches! And we will not bring the peace and blessings of God to our nation if we continue decreasing in numbers of faithful believers, both those won to the Lord by our witness, and those raised to be witnesses by our teaching.

In our churches, therefore, let us work to promote Christian marriage, to raise and nurture strong families, and to equip all the members of the Body of Christ for the work of sharing Jesus and proclaiming His Kingdom to every person in our community. For these are God's means for multiplying followers of Jesus Christ, and bringing His blessings and peace to ourselves and our neighbors.

For reflection

1. What does your church presently do to increase the community of God's people?
2. Why is it reasonable to expect that, if we are faithful in working to build up the believing community, God will grant us a fruitful harvest?
3. What opportunities does your Personal Mission Field present for building-up the believing community?

Next steps – Conversation: Talk with a prayer partner or other Christian friend about how you can encourage and assist one another to be more faithful in your witness for Christ.

5 Build for the Future

“Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit...Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you...” Jeremiah 29.5, 8

Future prospects

God had revealed to Jeremiah that the people of Jerusalem would be in exile in Babylon for seventy years. This meant that many of those who were being taken into captivity would die in Babylon. Indeed, it is quite possible that *most* of the exiled from Jerusalem found that to be the case for them.

When prospects are bleak, incentive to build for the future can be in short supply. Why work hard and seek to prosper if it’s all going to be taken from you anyway?

The way people view the future affects the way they live in the present. If one’s attitude toward the future is that things are only going to get worse, the bad guys are going to increase in strength, and the good guys will be reduced to a small remnant, waiting for the Lord to lift them out of their troubles into heavenly bliss – if that’s what we believe, it will have a huge effect on how we do our work, raise our children, and seek the welfare and peace of our neighbors.

Today there is no shortage of preachers and evangelists declaring just such a view of the future. Their counsel to the Church is, “There’s nothing we can do to avoid the growth and progress of evil. We just need to hang on until Jesus comes and raptures us up to heaven.”

That attitude toward our Kingdom-and-glory calling has no basis in Scripture (1 Thess. 2.12).

Not an option

The Jews in Jeremiah’s day might have been of a similar mind, but God commanded them instead to build for the future, to seek prosperity for themselves and their families, and to contribute to the social, cultural, economic, and spiritual wellbeing of the people around them.

Circling the wagons, caring only about your own needs, and hoping for the best was simply not an option.

The Scriptures teach the followers of Christ in every age to build for the future. We are to grow in the grace of our Lord (2 Pet. 3.18); take every thought captive for Jesus (2 Cor. 10.3-5); reconcile all things back to God (2 Cor. 5.17-21); stimulate one another to love and good works (Heb. 10.24); and live for God’s glory in every area of our lives (1 Cor. 10.31). The Daystar has arisen, John declared in 1 John 2.8-17, and the Light of Christ was even in John’s day advancing against the darkness of the sin-corrupted Roman world, bringing truth, hope, and new life wherever it went.

Daniel’s vision of the future, and ours

In exile in Babylon, Daniel saw the Kingdom of God as a growing stone. From its beginnings in the time of the Roman Empire throughout the course of history, God’s Kingdom would grow, expand, overcome all opposition, and fill the earth with the knowledge of God and His glory (Dan. 2.44, 45; Hab. 2.14). God was giving a Kingdom to His Son, and His Son would give it to His people. They, in turn, would endure much trial and opposition, but in the end, would bring the blessings of that Kingdom to the entire world (Dan. 7.13-27).

This is not the vision of the future held by many Christians today. For most Christians, the Kingdom which Daniel saw, Jesus proclaimed and brought near, and the Spirit inaugurated on that first Christian Pentecost – that Kingdom is little more than a theological idea, or a distant hope. It is not a daily reality to be sought,

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seized, shared, and strengthened in every nook and cranny of our Personal Mission Fields. Christians today are trapped in their past or mired in their present, and they have little or no sense of what it means to build for the future so that righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit increase wherever they live, move, and have their being.

But God calls us always to build for the future, to lay the foundations of blessing and spiritual advance in every area of life in our own day, so that those who inherit our “houses and fields” will find them strong and fruitful in their day as well.

Beware the false prophets who counsel a defeatist, withdrawing attitude toward the future. God has plans for our future, to fill us with hope, make Himself known, and use us as His people to bless the nations of the world. We are the bringers of peace, and God has promised that we shall overcome and prevail. Let’s work toward what God has promised, not what we’ve been taught to fear.

For reflection

1. Look at the vision of God’s Kingdom which Daniel saw in Daniel 2.44, 45 and Daniel 7.13-27. Compare that with what Isaiah saw in Isaiah 9.6, 7. Is this the Kingdom in which you live? Explain.
2. What does it mean to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6.33)? How is doing so a decidedly *future-oriented* way of life?
3. How do you expect to see the Kingdom of God coming, growing like a great mountain, in your Personal Mission Field?

Next steps – Conversation: Talk with some Christian friends about how you might encourage one another more effectively to seek the Kingdom of God.

6 Seek the Peace of the City

“And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace.” Jeremiah 29.7

The kindness of God

Even while they endured the hardships of exile in Babylon, the people of Israel needed to remember that God intended them to be a blessing to the world. They must never lose sight of those promises; they must draw near to God each day, to be revived and renewed in Him; and they must build for the future, to grow their communities in the grace and bounty of the Lord.

God’s message to the exiles in Babylon is His message to us as well.

People may rage against God, turn away from His Law, cast doubts on His existence, and pursue lives deliberately calculated to give offense to His holiness. Yet the love of God perseveres, even for such as these. His Spirit strives to keep rebellious unbelievers from destroying themselves with their sin; only reluctantly does God give people up to the consequences of their folly, and even then, He stands ready to welcome every repentant sinner.

The kindness of God, Paul reminds us, leads people to repentance (Rom. 2.4), and a primary way that kindness comes to an age in flight from God is through the faithful stewardship and diligent love of His obedient people.

God’s love for Babylon

Jeremiah counseled the exiles in Babylon to seek the peace of the nation to which God had sent them. The word is *shalom* – a kind of omnibus term of blessing, that means something like health, peace, prosperity, wellbeing, and salvation, all rolled into one. Defeated, humiliated, subjugated, and captive, still, Israel was to seek the peace and welfare of the people and cities of Babylon.

The Babylonians had shown nothing but scorn and violence toward Israel and her God; nevertheless, God had business to do with those people, and He intended that at least *some* of them should know His blessings.

Ironically enough, King Nebuchadnezzar himself became a worshipper of the one true God because of the faithful, frank, and loving ministry of Daniel (Dan. 4). As Daniel sought the welfare of the king and his court, through faithful living and bold witness, so all the people of God were expected to do with their neighbors in every quarter of the empire.

Joy and beauty of the earth?

And so we must do today. In many churches today, we rejoice and are quite happy when someone finds his way to our fellowship and begins to know the blessings of salvation and new life in Christ. But waiting for people to find their way in to our fellowship is a far cry from *seeking the peace* of our neighbors as part of our being-in-the-world as a the community. In Psalm 48 the Church is pictured as the joy and beauty of the whole earth. In how many communities today are churches regarded in this way? Not many, I suspect.

The Church does not exist for itself. It exists for God, for the Lord Jesus Christ, and for the purposes of the divine economy. God’s intention through the Church is that the rule of King Jesus – a Kingdom where liberty from sin and guilt leads to righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit – *that* rule might increase and affect the lives of hurting and needy people everywhere. It is the Church’s task, and the calling of every particular church, to love their neighbors and, like Jesus in that upper room, humble themselves to reach out as witnesses for Christ by word and deed.

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Believers have been redeemed unto good works (Eph. 2.10); we are not our own, we have been bought with the price of Jesus' blood and righteousness. The Church, as the Body of Christ, and each believer in his Personal Mission Field, should reflect in our earthly sojourn the same kind of care, giving, outreach, compassion, service, and witness that Jesus demonstrated while He was on earth.

The Church is now Jesus to the world, and we will not be able to fulfill that high and holy calling apart from a prayerful and consistent effort at bringing the salvation and blessings of God to the people in our communities.

For reflection

1. In what ways does your church seek to bring the beauty and joy of the Lord to its community?
2. Would you describe your church as reaching out to your community or waiting for the community to find its way to Jesus? Explain.
3. Do you agree that Jeremiah's instruction to the exiles in Babylon is relevant for Christians today? Explain.

Next steps – Demonstration: Try to find some way each day that you can show the beauty and joy of Jesus, and bring His peace, to people in your Personal Mission Field.

7 Pray for the City

“And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace.” Jeremiah 29.7

Praying for Babylon

In Psalm 137 the psalmist reacts negatively to an attempt on the part of one of his Babylonian captors to get him to sing one of the songs of Jerusalem. He was too distressed, to sad, and to angry to comply with his neighbor’s wish.

The bitterness and sorrow expressed in that psalm capture what must have been the heart burden of many of the people of Israel, as they endured captivity in Babylon. How could they sing the Lord’s songs in a foreign land? How could they even think of letting the cruel Babylonians gain any benefit from their devotions? And yet, and yet – Psalm 137, bitter and hard as it is, is a prayer to God, what we call an imprecatory psalm, calling the judgment of God down against those who would harm His people.

God commanded His exiled people to pray for their captors; doubtless such imprecatory prayers often arose from the midst of the captive people. And God approved them, understanding and compassionate with His people all the way.

But they must not stop here. Even as they sought the Lord’s vengeance against their captors, the exiles in Babylon were commanded also to seek His grace on their behalf, that He might penetrate their hearts, turning many to the knowledge of God. Asaph had shown the way for such prayer in Psalm 83.16. The people must also pray, as Daniel doubtless did for King Nebuchadnezzar, that their captors would repent of their violent and oppressive ways and learn to worship the living God.

Such prayers must have seemed like long shots for those who prayed them, but, given the experience of Nebuchadnezzar himself, we can believe that many Babylonians came to know the Lord as a result of such prayers.

A call to prayer

Seeking the welfare of the communities in which we live will be more effective when we bathe and envelop all our endeavors in prayer. Paul commanded that prayers and intercessions be made for all people everywhere (1 Tim. 2.1, 2). That surely includes the people in our communities, the teachers in our schools, those who own the businesses and farms, the civil magistrates, those who defend our nation at home and abroad, and all our neighbors, associates, and coworkers.

God works through prayer, and if we wish to see the blessings of God come to the people in our communities, then we shall have to begin praying for them more earnestly.

In our private devotions, before family dinners, in our churches and Bible study groups, where two or three believers are gathered for lunch or any other reason, let prayers ascend on behalf of our neighbors. The more we pray for people, the more we will be aware of them and their needs. The more attentive we are to them, the greater is the likelihood that we will begin to reach out to them with the blessings of God.

Prayer for our communities and our nation can unite churches across denominational divides, bring pastors together on behalf their community without jealousy or suspicion, and create a united voice for revival and awakening for the entire world.

Bringers of Peace

Will we pray?

Will we pray for our neighbors, our community, our nation, and our world?

If we will not, then we must face up to the fact that we are disobeying a divine mandate, abandoning our neighbors to their folly, and stoking the fires of indifference – if not outright scorn – for the unbelieving world around. But if we will pray, who knows what God might be willing to do?

Those prayers may be prayers of anguish and anger at times; but they must also be prayers for God to work in the hard hearts of our unsaved neighbors, just as He has worked in ours, to bring new life, forgiveness, and hope to those who now live apart from God in a world full of rebellion and sin.

If each of us will pray each day for the people in our Personal Mission Field, we will find that those prayers can have powerful effects in helping us fulfill our mission as bringers of peace to our world in flight from God. So to that end, let us pray – individually, with other believers, in groups, day by day, pleading with God to pour out His Spirit for revival, renewal, and awakening in our day, beginning in our Personal Mission Fields.

For reflection

1. What are some things you might pray for the lost people in your community? For the people in your Personal Mission Field?
2. Meditate on Isaiah 62:6, 7. How does this speak to the kind of prayers a church should offer for its community?
3. What are some things you could do to improve your prayers for the people in your Personal Mission Field?

Next steps – Transformation: Work at your prayer life until praying for the people in your Personal Mission Field is more consistent and more fruitful.

Bringers of Peace

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Should Christians ever have a reason *not* to seek the Lord for revival, renewal, and awakening? Explain.
2. How can you more consistently live toward the promises of God?
3. What might your church do to begin implementing Jeremiah's instructions to the people in Babylon?
4. Are you working your Personal Mission Field in a manner that reflects the content of God's teaching through Jeremiah? Explain.
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you implementing that lesson in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.