

God's Ways Are Perfect Jeremiah 29:10-14

When Robyn bought our house, there was a lot of junk left in the loft of the garage that she and her mom pitched out the window and threw to the curb for garbage pick-up. A couple things were kept. It seems that Mr. Higgenbotham was arming himself as he whittled away his time carving wooden doll arms. I'm not sure who his model was, but from this piece he or she had six fingers. Maybe he was recreating the Bible passage about the giant from Gath with 6 fingers on each hand.

Then there is this plate with a bowl and lid that he was in the process of making. He started to carve a floral design around the plate but never finished it.

How about you? Have you ever begun something that you never got around to finishing? Have you made plans but never followed through?

We discover from our passage today that God has plans for us and when He makes them, we can rest assured that He will finish what He started. Please turn to **Jeremiah 29:10-14**.

Let's get a picture of the back story leading up to our passage. The prophet Jeremiah began his ministry in Judah during the reign of King Josiah, who was the last good and godly king of Judah. He was the Great-grandson of Hezekiah, who also was a good and godly king. Josiah's reign ended in 609 BC. Jeremiah had a favorable relationship with Josiah, but that ended when Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, began to reign. He showed hostility toward Jeremiah by placing the prophet in prison. Nebuchadnezzar deposed Jehoahaz and made his brother, Jehoiakim, king. Jeremiah wrote a letter to the rebuking his sins and the sins of the nation. With disdain by what the prophet had written, after a section of the letter was read, he would cut it off and burn it.

It was only 23 years from the end of Josiah's reign in 609 BC to 586 BC when Babylon swept in and overtook Judah and led many Jews into captivity. Jeremiah continued to be a prophetic voice who

lamented over the demise of the nation. He is known as the weeping prophet because of his deep sorrow over the sins of the nation and God's judgment on them, hoping that they would repent and turn back to God. But in the midst of his lament, he recalls God's faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:21-26

Jeremiah 29 is a message of hope in God's faithfulness in which he tells the nation to settle down in the place where they have been exiled. A note in my study Bible says that **"by warning them to submit and not rebel, Jeremiah was revealing God's will to them – always the most sensible prospect under any circumstance."** But instead of giving them hope from this message that their captivity would end after 70 years, he was branded as a traitor.

One of the major themes of this book is God's judgment, that He is just in what He does, when His law is not obeyed. Time and again, God's prophets warned of impending judgment if they continued to disobey. But the book also shows God's love, mercy and patience, which allowed ample time for them to repent. We see in this book the balance between God's love and His judgment. Even though He is love, He cannot, nor will not overlook disobedience. Both His love and justice operate in perfect balance. Without justice, His love would seem weak and tolerant. Without love, His justice would be seen as harsh and cruel. Jeremiah shows both sides of God in that while He metes out judgment, He is also faithful in demonstrating mercy that does not consume us because of His never-ending faithfulness. Every day we can expect His mercy to be the same as it was the day before.

Chapter 29 is a letter that Jeremiah sent while he was still in Jerusalem to the exiles living in Babylon about one year after they were deported under Nebuchadnezzar. Let's pick it up at **verse 4**.

False prophets had quite a different message than Jeremiah. They claimed that God told them that the captivity would only last two years. The message Jeremiah had received from God was entirely different from the false prophets. Through the

prophet, God told Israel to settle down by building houses, planting gardens, raising families who were to get married and raise families of their own. They were to increase the Jewish population where they lived. He also told them to pray for the prosperity of their captors because if they prospered, the Jewish people would also prosper. Don't pray for their destruction, pray for their affluence.

Why would God tell them to do that?

Weren't they His people?

Didn't He want the best for them?

With that, we come to our passage where we will notice three things:

God's plan is perfect because of His forethought

God's purpose is perfect because of His forbearance

God's promise is perfect because of His faithfulness

In **verse 11** we notice first that God's plan is perfect because of His forethought.

I. GOD'S PLAN IS PERFECT BECAUSE OF HIS FORETHOUGHT – v. 11

The opening words of **verse 11** tell us that God's plan is perfect because of His omniscience.

A. God's Plan Is Perfect Because Of His Omniscience – v. 11a

Omniscience is a big, fancy theological word that means all-knowing, that He knows all things, past, present, and future at the same time. He knows that because He is outside of time. He sees everything in our time as being present to Him. When we read in **Genesis 1:1** and **John 1:1** "**in the beginning**", that doesn't mean God had a beginning, but that when time began God was already there. From His perspective, even though our events in time hadn't yet occurred, He was seeing it as being present to Him. As one source noted, "**His omniscience is the result of His infinite awareness, understanding and insight, which means He can never learn anything new, nor does anything take Him by surprise.**" It is nothing for Him to know where you were yesterday, where you are right now, and where you will be tomorrow, even though it hasn't even happened yet because He sees it all unfolding at the same time.

Omniscience is the state of total awareness and according to **I John 3:20**, He knows everything. If He is the ruler over all His creation, both the visible and invisible, by its very nature, He must also be all-knowing.

That omniscience is the very basis on which we can fully trust Him with what happens to us, and in fact, what is happening in all the world. His omniscience is why we can rest confidently in His promises knowing that He will be faithful to carry them out. His omniscience is an inherent part of His nature. He could not be God, if He was not all-knowing in even just one thing. So when God says to the exiles in Babylon "**I know**", you can rest assured that what He is about to say He knows firsthand because He's already seen it and allowed it. Akin to His omniscience is His omnipresence, that He is everywhere at the same time – past, present, and future. He doesn't need a time machine to travel from one century to another and back again. Being outside of time, He is also outside of space because in His creative act He made both.

So when it says that God "**knows**", He is able to then "**declare.**" He can be certain and clear about what He says because He is omniscient. He can speak emphatically and dogmatically because for one thing, He is all-knowing and for another thing, He does not lie. Lying is a moral contradiction to God's nature. He won't lie because He can never lie. His never changing holiness will keep from telling a lie.

Numbers 23:19 "**God is not a man...**

Proverbs 30:5 "**Every word of God is flawless.**"

Hebrews 6:18 "**It is impossible for God to lie.**"

Not only is God's plan perfect because He is omniscient, His plan is perfect because of His objective.

B. God's Plan Is Perfect Because Of His Objective – v. 11b

We have all made plans at one time or another in which those plans didn't happen because of some unforeseen circumstance outside our control.

Finishing first or second in every track meet in the mile my Senior year of High school, I had plans to qualify to run the mile in the State track meet. But that changed when I was disqualified for stepping in front of another runner.

Running college cross-country, I had plans to letter all four years that were altered when I was sidelined my Senior year due to a knee injury.

During vacation, our plans to spend the day at the Airforce Museum were altered when we ran over a piece of metal in the road that punctured our tire making us spend half the day at Discount Tire.

I had plans to attend a Bible Conference one year that had to be cancelled to conduct a funeral.

I had plans last year to do Good Friday and Easter messages that were altered because I came down with COVID.

How many of you know that our plans aren't necessarily God's plans, that He has something else planned for us that changes what we want to do?

The fact is, we all have plans of some kind that get altered because we didn't know what was going to happen that caused them to be changed or cancelled. But God says He has plans for us, and because of what we just learned about His omniscience, His plans won't change and we can be certain His plans will happen just as He said. Though it may be a trial, His plans are for our best.

Now your Bible may use another term for plans. It may read "thoughts." The basic idea is the use of the mind in thinking about an activity that we want to happen, some objective we hope takes place. God had certain objectives that He wanted to achieve in and for the people of Israel. He speaks first of His current plan for Israel.

1. God's current plan for Israel – v. 11b (4-7)
“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you...’”

Look back at **verses 4-7**.

God wanted Israel to prosper, but He wanted them to prosper in the land of their exile. In order for them to prosper, it meant that they had to remain in God's will. His will included them being there for seventy years. Jump to the New Testament.

James 4:13-17

In order for Israel to prosper; in order for God to accomplish His objective, Israel needed to remain in God's will, which for them meant they would be in captivity for seventy years. For God to do what He wanted to do in the lives of the people of Israel, it was God's will that they remain under Babylonian rule for seven decades. For most people, that's a lifetime. We are by nature, not very patient people. When there is a traffic jam, we look for another route.

We change checkout lines because the one we're in isn't going as fast as we think it should, especially when the cashier asks for a price check.

We think the microwave takes too long.

Instant mashed potatoes aren't fast enough.

We don't like it when cars are lined up three deep at Speedway to get gas.

God had an objective, a current plan to prosper them that required a prolonged exile in Babylon.

When our plans are altered, know that God has some objective in mind, something that is part of His will, something He wants us to learn in His current plans for us, just like He did for Israel. If we want to learn what He wants us to learn, we need to stay in His will and not try to hurry things up. Otherwise we will miss out on what He wants to teach us.

God not only had current plans for Israel, He also had coming plans for Israel. He had future plans for them if they would remain in His will.

2. God's coming plan for Israel – vv. 10-11c

“This is what the Lord says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill My gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord,...‘plans to give you a

hope and a future.”

God had plans for their present and their future. It was something that would give them hope. They may have thought that all hope was lost when they were taken into captivity. They may have thought that there was no future for them as a nation, but God declared by His omniscient plan that they had something to look forward to, something that would happen in the future.

Israel may not have understood what God had in mind for them, but they could be confident that because of His forethought, His plans were perfect. That applies to us as well. We may find ourselves in some dire situation in which there seems to be no way out, no future, no hope. That's when we need to remember that His plans are perfect. And that brings us to our second point. If God's plan is perfect because of His forethought, God's purposes are perfect because of His forbearance.

II. GOD'S PURPOSES ARE PERFECT BECAUSE OF HIS FORBEARANCE – vv. 12-13

For Israel to prosper in the present and for the future, they had to obey God's will and trust His plan. That goes for us as well.

When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will, He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt or a fear, not a sigh or a tear,
Can abide while we trust and obey.

Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,
But our toil He doth richly repay;
Not a grief or a loss, not a frown or a cross,
But is blessed if we trust and obey.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

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God was telling Israel to accept what had happened.

They were in Babylon because He had a purpose for it. They were to be patient because it wouldn't last forever. But they were also not to have false hopes that it would end sooner than He planned because He had a purpose for it.

What God plans for us, we can rest assured that He has a purpose, that has some reason for it even if we don't understand it, even when it lasts longer than we want it to.

In Genesis, God took a teenaged boy out of the love and comfort of his father and home and made him a slave, then a prisoner. But God had a plan and a purpose for Joseph to give he and his family hope and a future by prospering them in Egypt.

Genesis 50:20 “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

Paul and Silas spent the night chained to stocks in a Philippian jail after being unjustly beaten. That may seem unfair. We may feel outrage at the injustice, but in their pain was God's purpose to bring a jailer and his family to the place of trusting Christ as Savior.

In Acts we see that the persecution of Christians resulted in the purpose of spreading the gospel.

The suffering of Job was allowed by God to open his eyes to see God for who He really is.

Sometimes the purpose of God for us includes pain in His plan. What we need to understand, as God explains to the people of Israel in exile is that His perfect plan always has a perfect purpose.

James 1:2-4

James tells us about the pain of trials, trials that God allows because He has perfect plans, plans that have a purpose. **Verses 3 and 4** tell us what that purpose is. The trials God allows develop perseverance and spiritual maturity so that our faith grows.

When I went to physical therapy after my rotator cuff surgery, the therapist had a plan to renew my range of motion. Every exercise had a purpose. There were a lot of days that I didn't enjoy the pain.

But the pain was necessary to get me to the place of having good range of motion and strength.

**Why did God allow their seventy-year exile?
What purpose did He have planned for them in what may have looked like He had abandoned them?**

Let's remember that if His plan is perfect, then so is His purpose. Notice in **verses 12-13** three things about God's purpose. **"Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart."**

- A. God's Purpose Is To Pursue Him**
- B. God's Purpose Is To Petition Him**
- C. God's Purpose Is To Perceive Him**

God wants us to seek Him when we are in trouble.
God wants us to pray to Him when we are in trouble.
God wants us to know Him and look to Him when we are in trouble.

I hope you learned from last week's message that when we don't know what to do, we need to have our eyes on the Lord, that whatever the trials and tribulations He allows in our lives that we seek Him, pursue Him, look to Him.

*Trials dark on every hand,
And we cannot understand
All the ways that God would lead us
To that blessed Promised Land;
But He'll guide us with His eye,
And we'll follow till we die;
We will understand it better by and by.*

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Many of the Psalms are expressions that support God's purpose for Israel. The Psalmist sought God and prayed to Him during times of desperation and learned to experience God's provision.

Psalm 3:1-8

Psalm 13:1-2, 5 "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?...But I trust in Your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in Your salvation."

Do we spend time calling out to Him in prayer when you are going through trials?

I asked the Lord to comfort me
When things weren't going my way;
He said to me, "I will comfort you
And lift your cares away."
I asked the Lord to walk with me, when darkness was all that I knew;
He said to me "Never be afraid, for I will see you through."
I did not ask for riches, He gave me wealth untold,
The moon, the stars, the sun, the sky, He gave me eyes to behold.
I thank the Lord for everything, and I count my blessings each day;
He came to me when I needed Him, I only had to pray.
He'll come to you, if you ask Him to,
For He's only a prayer away. CCLI1292471

Isaiah 40:27-31

As God spoke to Israel in the early days of their captivity telling them to settle down in the middle of a pagan culture, He gave them words of hope that were to strengthen them through the duration of their exile. He reminded them that His plan is perfect. He reminded them that His purposes are perfect. He wanted them to pursue Him as a lover seeks his beloved. Even in their pain He wanted them to yearn for Him, to seek Him wholeheartedly.

God longed for them to pray to Him rather than the false gods they had looked to for so many years. He wanted them to perceive Him, to know Him, that if they sought after Him with their whole heart, they would find Him because He wanted to be known by them. He was not playing hide and seek with them. He wanted to be found by them, but they had to pursue Him with all their heart.

Proverbs 8:17 "I love those who love Me, and those who seek Me diligently find Me."

Deuteronomy 4:29 "But from there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find Him, if you search after Him with all your heart and with all your soul."

I Chronicles 16:11 "Seek the Lord and His

strength; seek His presence continually!”

Hebrews 11:6 “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.”

In times of distress, when facing tribulations of all kinds, when you don't know where to look, are you pursuing God? Are you petitioning God? Are you perceiving God? If not, He wants you to find Him. Are your eyes on the Lord?

God's plan is perfect because of His forethought
God's purpose is perfect because of His forbearance
God's promise is perfect because of His faithfulness

III. GOD'S PROMISE IS PERFECT BECAUSE OF HIS FAITHFULNESS – vv. 10, 14

We may not understand why we are going through what we are going through.

We may not understand why we are going through what we are going through for as long as we are going through it.

But if His plan is perfect and His purpose is perfect, then we know that whatever He has in store comes from His promises that are perfect.

But as the Israelites knew and what we also know, God's promises sometimes includes agony.

A. God's Promises Sometimes Includes Agony – v. 10

There is this misunderstanding that when we follow the Lord, bad things shouldn't happen to good people. We don't like that God's plan sometimes takes us through pain. We don't like that God's purpose sometimes requires agony to get what He wants to accomplish in us.

We want to bypass all the hardship on our way to heaven.

We want a beautiful garden without having to pull all the weeds.

We want a toned body without all that dieting and exercise.

We want to run the race without logging all those miles.

We want spiritual maturity without all that's required in the process.

But as we learn from **verse 10**, we sometimes must go through agony to get the accomplishment, we have to go through the pain to reach the prize, we have to go through the problems to get the promise.

When God says something it will happen just as He said it would. We can rest assured that what God promises is always accomplished.

B. God's Promises Are Always Accomplished – v. 14

That ought to bring a shout of Amen and Hallelujah. That ought to excite us that God's plan and God's purpose also come with a promise, a reward that is at the end of what may be a long, hard journey.

At the end of the seventy years of exile, God promised to bring them back to the Promised Land, the place of their inheritance.

Never forget that God always completes what He begins. Matthew Henry reminds us that God does nothing by halves. He doesn't start something and then not complete it. He always finishes what He starts as we are reminded in **Philippians 1:6 “being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ.”** Just know that at times it will involve the pain of trials to bring about what God purposes.

You may be going through something right now that makes you feel like you're in some sort of exile, banished from God, but know that He is with you.

He has a plan for you.

He has a purpose for you.

He has a promise for you that He will keep.

Hebrews 10:23 “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.”

God promised to bless His people in the middle of a pagan culture if they remained in His will, promising that one day they would be delivered. Matthew Henry stated that God would **“give them not the expectations of their fears, nor the**

expectations of their fancies, but the expectations of their faith, the end which he has promised and which will turn for the best to them.”

Do you have faith in His plan?

Do you have faith in His purpose?

Do you have faith in His promises?

Promises encourage us to pursue after God.

Promises encourage us to pray to God. Prayer may not quicken an answer, but it will help us seek God more passionately. And those who wholeheartedly seek Him will never seek in vain. You will find Him

Even though Israel had the benefit of being told the duration of their exile, it was something they still had to endure. But God had given them a hope, a promise, that they would be delivered.

God’s plan for us is perfect

God’s purpose for us is perfect

God’s promise for us is perfect

II Corinthians 4:17-18 “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

Remember: God finishes what He starts because you are His masterpiece. He will never leave you undone.