

Home Group

Next week: Rom 2.17-3.8 (with HG notes), Then Jeremiah 30-31 (prob without HG notes). People love to be invited to Christingle, Carols etc. So go ahead and invite them.

Welcome:

How ready for Christmas are you? (answers from this might want to be picked up in prayers later!)

Worship: Psalm 20**Word:**

1. Read Jer 28.1-11, Jer 29.4-14.
2. I did a lot of reading into the lives of Uriah and Ahikam. How much of that was fair?
3. Perhaps more so with Hananiah. Was that fair?
4. What's right / wrong with being a people pleaser? How to get the balance?
5. Try learning Jer 29.11 as a memory verse!
6. Why is Shiloh such a big metaphor? (I wanted to fit Psalm 78.60 in somewhere but its not in a very worshipful setting.) cf 1Sam1-4 for its importance.
7. We've looked how others viewed the Memory verse, why not look Shemaiah (Jer 29.24-32). What would it mean to him?
8. if you've not already answered it, what does the mem verse mean to you in your situation? Is it a challenge? Is it full of hope? Does it bring out the pessimist or the optimist?

Works:

Jeremiah and Romans is (so far) full of talk about how its not enough to be merely people who study the Word of God. Its good to wrap up the evening by praying for each other but see if there is some small practical deed you can do for someone either in your group or not part of the church at all. Maybe the whole group could get behind this effort?

God says: For **I know the plans** I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jer 29.11

This really ought to be a **memory** verse for each of us. It was originally part of a **letter that Jeremiah** sent from Jerusalem to Babylon, to the people who had been **dragged off into exile** in the first fall of Jerusalem in 597 and here we are now a few years **before 586bc** when the city of Jerusalem and its temple will be destroyed.

Jeremiah sends this letter in which he **encourages** a people who were **depressed**, felt **abandoned**. Their only consolation was that everything was **okay back at home** in Jerusalem.

This memory verse has become **something good to hold on to** when you are struggling. **I know the plans** I have for you – I know what I am doing, you're not forgotten, you're **not abandoned**, I still have a plan says God and it's a good plan, to prosper to give you hope and a future. That's a good plan.

You should take a hold of this and learn it as a **memory** verse.
Lets see **how it works** out for some of the people in this story.

There's a man called **Uriah**. Because many of you are well read in the bible I expect you to have heard of Uriah the Hittite, **Bathsheba's** husband, King David had him killed so that he could have Bathsheba. It makes for an interesting sermon but it's the **wrong** Uriah.

This is **Uriah the prophet**. He has been saying the same things that Jeremiah has been saying about how God is going to bring **judgement** on the sins of Jerusalem. You'll understand why that doesn't sound like a nice **patriotic** kind of thing to say and so the king wants him dead.

Uriah runs away but he runs off to Egypt. But there was a very good **extradition** treaty between Egypt and Jerusalem and so Uriah is arrested and sent back and **killed**.

Now let's think about that memory verse – Jer 29.11 For I know the **plans I have** for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and **not to harm** you, plans to give you hope and a future.

How will Uriah hear those words? Do they sound a bit **hollow**? Maybe.

Uriah had a choice, **Not to preach** what God was telling him or To preach it. He could have chosen not to preach it in which case God would still have **allowed the Babylonians** to invade. So **avoiding the truth** wasn't going to be a good way to live for Uriah. On the other hand to preach the message carried with it the **outside possibility** that the people would listen, that they might change. Uriah **took the risk of saving a whole** nation.

It led to his **martyrdom** yes but we trust that God will take that into account come the day of judgement.

Uriah did the right thing. It did not result in a Nation being saved – though it probably **did help some**, individually to hear the call to repent and to obey God and so maybe Uriah did help save some people.

Jer 29.11 **For I know the plans** I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Let's have a look at **Ahikam** son of Shaphan. Ahikam is an official, he's on the king's staff, he's paid to run the government and the nation, what's left of it. His **daddy**, Shaphan, was a secretary to King Josiah – so that's less than 10 years ago – and Daddy was the man who **helped when the Torah** was found.

It's hard to understand this but it would seem that for a while they **lost their bible**, literally and years later they found it. Presumably it had been hidden during a time of **bad kings**. Daddy had helped find it, brought it to King Josiah, and this had led to a short period of **revival** and peace in the land.

His son, **Ahikam** seems to have **inherited** Daddy's job. He is high up in power and **influence**. He has recently seen Uriah put to death so he knows that these are **dangerous** times for anyone wanting to do the **right thing**. but he does it. Ahikam **protects Jeremiah**.

We all of us have to **run this risk**. Ahikam has his health and his wealth, he probably has a family too. He is respected and in a **comfortable position**. He **does not need God** to have any fresh new plans for him.

But Ahikam is **not satisfied** with that. Ahikam wants the **truth** and he wants to be **true to God**. So he goes out on a limb and protects Jeremiah from being killed like Uriah.

We **don't know** what happened to Ahikam. He must have lived a little longer because his son **Gedaliah** will be a governor (in place of a king) in Jerusalem after the destruction of Jerusalem. (more about that later!)

So how does **Ahikam view this** memory verse: Jer 29.11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Ahikam was **comfortable** but he risked it to do the right thing. Unlike Uriah, Ahikam kept his life but like Uriah they both kept their **integrity**, they can both look God in face come the day of Judgement, **they did the right** thing as best they could.

Now let's look at **Hananiah**. Hananiah is a prophet – of the LORD almighty – he **isn't** a prophet of **Baal** or some other deity, he is definitely someone who worships the LORD God. But he is a **people pleaser**.

It's so hard when you have a job that's about trying to keep as many people happy as possible and at the same **time staying close to God**. Hananiah wants to stay close to God but he also wants to keep as many people happy as possible. So he has finally **had enough of Jeremiah's** gloomy sermons about how we must repent and obey God or else judgement will fall on us. So he preaches a different sermon. He says Remember those **people** who were taken away a few years back (597bc)? They will be back within two years. And remember all that **temple furniture** they took, well that will come back as well. 2 years.

Back in chapter 26, Jeremiah preached a sermon in which he said **If you do not listen to God**, if you do not follow the Torah then God will make this temple, this wonderful amazing temple that Solomon built, maybe 400 years earlier – this place will become like **Shiloh**.

That's a bit like me saying to you, if you don't buck up then this place will become like the **Tin Tabernacle** up by where the Frosts live. Some of you will say But I've never heard of that place – to which I reply **Exactly!** God will make this beautiful church as if no one had ever heard of it! And others of you who know something of its story will bury your head in your hands and say **Please God No!**

Now try being Jeremiah and saying that about the magnificent temple. It's **practically blasphemous**. The priests and prophets call for Jeremiah's death and take him to trial.

600 years from this point and another man will speak against the temple and warn how it too will be destroyed and the result will be that the priests will take him to trial only this time they will succeed and **crucify** him.

Jeremiah is acquitted but it doesn't stop him preaching what God tells him to preach. Jeremiah makes a **yoke** (the idea is closer to a **stock** – its for chaining up slaves rather than for carrying things). A yoke to symbolise what life is going to be like soon.

Hananiah can't take it anymore and breaks the yoke and says No, God says two years. In 2 years time this **nightmare will all be over**.

Maybe Hananiah has a new message from God, maybe God is speaking through Hananiah. Jeremiah doesn't know this. So he says That's Great! Praise the Lord! Amen! May what you say be true, please let this nightmare be over with soon. And Jeremiah walks away – that takes some courage and **restraint!** But the truth is that Hananiah is making this up. He is saying stuff to **please the king**, to please the people. Perhaps he is doing it with the best of motives, after all you've got to find **some hope** in this troubled time.

Hananiah is a **godly man but** he has become a people pleaser. (Careful here! Just because you're not a people pleaser (ie annoying and irritating, doesn't make you a godly man!))

How does this **memory verse** work for Hananiah: Jer 29.11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "**plans to prosper** you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. And Hananiah says **Its too risky**. He doesn't know what plans God has. He **cannot see** that God could ever have a plan that involved the destruction of God's own house – that makes no sense to him at all. If there is **anywhere on this planet** that is safe then it is inside the temple. Here everything stays the same and you are safe from everything outside.

That's why there are **these funny prophecies** about even the **furniture** being returned from exile. Everything back to the good old days of Solomon. One commentator said "People have always focussed more passionately on holy objects than appeals to holy living." (D Kidner BST)

So Hananiah says God may have a plan for me **but it is too risky**, I cannot believe it. Jeremiah says Not only do you **preach lies** but you are leading a people into **false hope**, to believe a lie and the net result of that is that they won't want to hand themselves over to Babylon, they will **resist** and the result of that is that many **people will get hurt** and die because you have preached a lie.

St **Paul** wrote to the Romans about how we do like to **exchange the truth for a lie**. It is easier to go our own way and sometimes **God will allow** that to happen. Paul calls it the **wrath** of God. And it's not a pretty thing.

Jeremiah tells Hananiah that he will be **dead within the year**. Jeremiah's prophecy will be proved true but everyone will forget that detail and still Jeremiah's message **isn't getting through**. So that's why he wrote this letter to people who were already in exile. Some of the prophets there **didn't like it**. But Jeremiah was speaking the truth.

Jer 29.11 For **I know the plans** I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

You need to work out what that means in your situation. That might mean that you will need to have the **courage** to speak the truth like Uriah and take the risk. **Whistleblow** and make your stand. You might get **fired** and perhaps not in this country but there are other places where you may get put to **death**. But you can at least die knowing that you **tried**.

Or to be like **Ahikam** and use the **resources** the power and tools that you're good at, to do the right thing even though it might not be the popular thing.

Jeremiah's letter said **Start up new businesses**, plant crops, have sex, have **babies** and marry them off, settle down. Don't curse the place you're in but **bless** it. **Build and bless**. If life gives you a lemon, make lemonade because God has not finished with you.

Jer 29.11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Amen.