

(Tearfund Service)**Introduction**

- What does the Bible have to say about Literacy?
 - directly, **not a lot!**
 - most of the world in Biblical times was **illiterate**; only a few could read, and much early Scripture would have been memorised by people when they couldn't read it, nor afford the very expensive parchment or papyrus on which it was written.
- However, that's not to say that Scripture has **nothing** to say!
 - for into situations of **difficulty** God speaks **hope**
 - into situations of **disadvantage and lack of opportunity**, God speaks **freedom**
- Let's explore some of the background to the passage from Jeremiah we read earlier, and seek to apply it to the kinds of things we've been thinking about this morning:

Context

- God's people in Judah:
 - northern kingdom of Israel already over-run
 - within past few years **Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon** has conquered Judah and taken into **exile** the leaders of the people - members of the royal family, court officials (civil service), craftsmen and artisans (**those with skills and training**)
 - left behind a **puppet king** and a remnant of the people
 - some **false prophets** have been predicting the end of the exile in less than 2 years
 - but **Jeremiah** has been told by God that it will be a **long exile**
- Its out of this context that Jeremiah writes his letter, **from Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon**
- Notice a couple of things about the context before we move to the core message of the passage:

First, this is a letter!!

- we have this passage before us because Jeremiah or his scribe was able to write, and because he knew there would be people in Babylon able to read what he'd written
- God was able to both communicate **then** and preserve his communication so he can still speak to us **today** through the medium of written communication!
- remember that the original motivation for the **Meserete Kristos** church in setting up their project was to **enable people to read the Scriptures for themselves**

Second, notice how the Babylonians sought to oppress the Jews

- by taking away from them their skilled, educated leadership
- the same principle applies today - **when we deny education to a people, we oppress and disempower them**
- the Babylonians knew it - **and used it as a tool of war!**

third, notice God's command to his people in exile:

- (v.7) "seek the peace and **prosperity** of the city"
- though final freedom would one day come - **70 years on, not 2** - God's people were to **live fully now**, to engage with the opportunities God had given them, to be as much as they were able to be in the context of exile as they could be
- every human is in exile, exile from heaven, from our intended place in God's presence
- but God does not call us, even those who know that heaven will be our final home, to sit and wait to die!

- he calls us to live now, to be as much as we can be of what he created us to be - the opportunities education bring being but one example of that

Hope, Plans, Future

- God hates sin!
 - because it is an insult to his character
- Why is sin an insult to his character?
 - because it **denies his divinity** - if we fully acknowledged him, we'd go his way!
 - and because it **defaces that which he has made!**
- God created human beings to live in relationship with him, he created us with almost limitless potential to create, to work, to worship:
 - to do things which bring glory to him, which reflect all of his image that he has poured into us!
- Perhaps it has become clear to you during the course of the service that giving people literacy skills **opens the door to them becoming more of what God made them to be!**
 - and that is good and worth doing in itself!
 - however, it gets better!
- For as we open that door to people, it also makes it easier to explain to them the God who made them to enjoy such opportunity!
 - teach someone to read and you begin to show them they are skilled, that they are **"fearfully and wonderfully made"** in the Psalmist's words!
 - open the door to work that is truly fulfilling, and you show them a glimpse of the proper stewardship of the earth we were created for before the Fall (Gen 1:26,28)
- (v. 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.*
- God's desire for his people then, and for people now, is that we live with hope, with a fore-taste of the future he has in store for us.
 - literacy skills are but one way in which people can have the door to such hope, the pathway to expectations of a future opened to them
- Its not the destination - **for only the hope of heaven will ever truly satisfy!**
 - but it can be a **fore-taste of that hope**, and an **opportunity to demonstrate something of what God made us to be**