



Planning Ahead by Will Hesterberg

The beginning of a New Year often prompts people to make resolutions – usually plans to improve, to change. Some people also try to predict what events might take place in the coming year. Often, though, such plans and predictions fall flat.

We can be sure that 2018 will usher in challenges and problems. Because we live in a broken world, even our most carefully laid plans can quickly unravel.

As we consider how uncertain the future really is, God speaks words of reassurance to His people. “I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans for welfare and not to harm you, to give you a future and a hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11) God directed Jeremiah to speak these words to the people of Israel during one of the darkest periods of their history. They had been deported by King Nebuchadnezzar to the distant land of Babylon and may have felt that God had forgotten them. But God reassures them, and us, that He is still in control, that He is working out His plan for good.

God tells them, “I have a plan for you.” The deportation was no accident, no mistake, no end. God had a reason, a purpose for these painful events. God was in charge, not Nebuchadnezzar. God knew what He was doing. His plan was unfolding.

God’s plan was for their health. The Hebrew word for “welfare” in the ESV and “good” in the NIV is the multifaceted “shalom” which means much more than simply peace or absence of strife. It can also mean health, prosperity, safety, restfulness, wellbeing. God’s plan was to bless them spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

Secondly, this plan is not to hurt or harm them. Painful and difficult as the deportation was, God meant not to hurt them but to bring good out of it as only He could and would. God

wanted to communicate that love and care motivated and emanated from His plan. He had never stopped loving them.

That plan had a time component, the hereafter, the ultimate future. God’s plan has a destination, a point to it. God’s plan unfolds in history as it leads to the hereafter in heaven. God’s plan is to redeem all His people, to conform them to the likeness of His Son, and then to bring them to heaven where they can enjoy the Triune God forever.

That plan would give hope for the present difficulties. Knowing that God was sovereign, that He knew what He was doing, that He still loved them, and that He would succeed, gave them hope as they settled down in Babylon to wait on God’s working in, through, and for them.

The truths of Jeremiah 29:11 still apply to us in our circumstances in 2018. Instead of worrying, we can hold on to hope; instead of wondering and questioning, we can trust that God’s plans are for our welfare. We can best plan ahead for 2018 by embracing His sovereign good plans. He shows us how to do this through the words of the Apostle Paul: “work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works (out His plan) in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12, 13).

Opportunities to Pray for ITEM

1. Pray for the new field in Bolivia that will enable ITEM to reach more Christian leaders in South America.
2. Pray for Jacob Bluebaugh teaching Biblical Theology at KRBC in January.
3. Pray that ITEM investors will give generously in 2018 as we have so many more opportunities to teach.
4. Pray for at least 11 more instructors to fill the teaching slots still open.



2017 in Review

Since ITEM is all about training national Christian leaders, perhaps one way to review this past year is by listing the instructors, their subject and field, and the number of leaders who attended.

* In January Fritz Harms taught Reformation Church History in Latvia to 12 leaders; * Steve Lucas taught Romans to 17 leaders in Romania.

* In February Will Hesterberg taught Genesis and Mike McLaughlin taught Romans to 75 leaders in Kenya; *John Lewis taught Evangelism and Missions to 17 leaders in Ukraine.

* In March Bill Wilton, Tom Smith, and Maurice Sikes led a preaching conference in Romania for 45 leaders on Preaching from the Gospels; Bill Wilton and Rob Toornstra led the same preaching conference in Ukraine for 60 leaders; * John Irwin taught 10 leaders in Ukraine on the History and Theology of the NT; * Jim Roszell trained 15 leaders in Romania on the Letters of Paul; * Jacob Bluebaugh taught 15 Ukrainian leaders on Cults; * Phil DeHart helped train 120 leaders on Missions in Indonesia.

* In May Mark Vander Hart trained 17 Latvian leaders in OT Pentateuch; * Jeff Richards taught 14 leaders in Ukraine in Spiritual Formation and Discipleship.

* In June Bill Boekestein trained 7 Croatian leaders in Eschatology; * we enabled 4 NE Indian leaders to train 37 new church leaders.

* In July 8 Romanian leaders received training in Church History through Fritz Harms; * Larry and Linda McAuley trained 91 leaders in Kenya in Biblical

Leadership and Transformational Community Development.

*August saw Bill Wilton and Rob Toornstra bring a Christ-centered Preaching conference first to 27 leaders in Andhra Pradesh, India and *then to 46 leaders in Indonesia.

* In September Michael Payne taught Apologetics to 19 Latvian leaders; * Jim Roszell trained 15 Ukrainian leaders in Hermeneutics and Bible Study Methods; * Eugene Oldham trained 36 Croatian leaders directly and through live-streaming; * John Van Schepen helped train 89 Kenyan leaders in God and Man; * John Lewis trained 25 leaders in Philippians in Bangalore and Chennai, India.

* In October Dick Moes and Maurice Sikes brought a Preaching Conference on the Epistles to 27 leaders in Romania; * then Dick Moes and Tom Smith brought the same preaching conference a week later to 30 Ukrainian leaders; * Bob Smart trained 46 leaders and 100 high school students in Marriage and Family in Indonesia.

* In November Dr. Kamphius trained 15 Latvian leaders in Christology; * Cal Hoogendoorn taught 12 leaders in Ukraine in OT Introduction/Survey; * in Kenya Charles Williams trained 89 leaders in Christ and Salvation; * God used Mitchell Persaud to train 63 leaders in Bangalore and Chennai, India, in Pastoral Counseling; * and Will Hesterberg and Norris Lessley trained 50 Bolivian leaders in OT Introduction/Survey and Romans.

The Year in Quick Review

1. 43 Instructors trained 1259 national Christian leaders for ITEM in 2017.
2. 2 new fields – Kenya and Bolivia have been added to now total 13 fields in 9 countries.
3. The instructor pool has increased by 37 to 95 potential trainers.
4. The number of instructors needed in 2018 will increase to 64 from 43 in 2017.
5. Financial figures for 2017 will be in the February newsletter.

In the U.S. send to ITEM, PO Box 31456, St Louis, MO 63131 or through paypal at www.ITEM.org. Email: lwhesterberg@gmail.com. Contributions to ITEM in Canada may be sent to ITEM, c/o Action International Ministries, 3015 A, 21st Street NE, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2E 7T1. **Phone # 618-939-5069.**