

Reflection of Suffering in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic for Believers Based on Jeremiah 29:11

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Abstract

This study aims to reflect on suffering in the context of the Covid-19 Pandemic for believers based on Jeremiah 29:11 by choosing to use a descriptive qualitative method approach and literature analysis, collecting data through book sources including the Bible, some journals and various digital articles, as well as documents. They are related to the topic under study. The crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in great anxiety, doubt, despair, depression and even death among all people, including believers. The presence of a pandemic that never ends is a reality and a threat that must be faced every day by everyone without exception. The result: First, believers must remain with all their heart, soul and body, trusting God's design and faithfulness in any condition, including in the process of suffering, because they believe God is sovereign over His plan. Second, believers must remain aware that God's purpose is related to the salvation of His people, so believers need and must view suffering from God's point of view.

Keywords

reflection of suffering; context of the covid-19 pandemic; believers; Jeremiah 29:11



I. Introduction

Talking about suffering is about unpleasant conditions that must be endured and avoided by humans, even though suffering is natural and part of human life. If suffering does not come from God, then the question arises why God allows suffering to be experienced by believers and whether God likes to see His people suffer. It is difficult in the Christian context to trace the origin of suffering on earth because suffering is something that is not good, so it cannot come from God, who is good and who has created everything well (Nicolas, 2022). Suffering is a struggle or a problem of faith because there are people who can accept the suffering they experience so that they become more faithful in the trials of suffering; on the other hand, there are people who find it difficult to accept their suffering so that they consider a loving God as a concept of deception or fantasy because they are considered unable to accept their suffering. help so that it does not need to be trusted (Hidayat, 2016).

David Alinurdin, in a journal entitled "Covid-19 and the Achilles Heel of the Christian Faith", stating the problem of suffering can be likened to a weak point of the Christian faith. On the other hand, the Covid-19 pandemic is a strong message for humanity to warn that God does not leave; on the contrary, suffering shows that God is speaking, present, and acting amid human survival (Alinurdin, 2020). Keep in mind that not all unpleasant or bitter things are bad. For example, prescription and traditional medicines are not always sweet or pleasant for those who drink them but provide excellent benefits for recovering sick people. A similar

opinion was conveyed by Sundoro that, due to painful experiences, humans actually question God's love, power and existence so that some abandon their faith. Some even take a shortcut to commit suicide due to the severity of suffering and difficulties they feel because of God's assumption unable to help (Tanuwidjaja, 2020).

According to (Manullang, 2020), there is suffering that has the aim of bringing one's faith to be purified and growing, and there is also suffering that can be a means of bringing glory to God. Hence, it is not permissible to apply a narrow retributive theology to all cases of suffering (Telly Tumamar, 2014). In other words, suffering has benefits and is necessary for the process of spiritual growth of believers. However, for those who died and could not survive while suffering, Paul David said that weakness only shows the actual reality: our life's dependence is entirely on God in all things (David, 2020).

In 2019 visitors, the whole world was shocked in December by a tragedy resulting in phenomenal unrest. They were starting from Wuhan in China, where the first patient of the coronavirus (Covid-19) was found by the international medical community based on the news m.cnnindonesia.com on December 4, 2020. WHO (World Health Organization), a world health organization has determined an outbreak of the disease covid -19 as a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, was caused by a drastic increase in positive cases in 114 countries, which was thirteen times, and by April 2020 had spread to 210 countries (Valerisha, Anggia, & Putra, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic, which has entered its ninth month since the discovery of the first infected case in Indonesia on March 2, 2020, is still not over, and it is indicated that Indonesia has a Covid-19 emergency. The world is about 20.6 percent based on the news reported by www.kompas.id on December 25, 2020. It is estimated that the impact is extensive in areas of human life such as work, education, economics, politics and spirituality. The effect can further result in increased worry, fear and panic to depression, and the cause is because the very high spread of this sick can hurt the mental and psychological health of patients and those around them, including family and neighbors, and even medical personnel (Keliat B. A., 2018).

The negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human psychology and mentality can occur due to loneliness, sadness, fear, concern about socioeconomic status, hopelessness, panic, stress, anger, anxiety, helplessness and stigma (Maulida et al, 2020). The Association of Indonesian Mental Medicine Specialists (PDAKJI) released several psychological problems experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, including anxiety at 65%, depression at 62% and trauma at 75%. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be taken lightly and must be a severe concern for all parties. With the COVID-19 outbreak, Christians and the entire world population are in the midst of an atmosphere where suffering and death are so natural and close simultaneously, scary (Lukito, 2020). Sihombing (2020) state that Covid-19 pandemic caused everyone to behave beyond normal limits as usual. The outbreak of this virus has an impact especially on the economy of a nation and Globally (Ningrum, 2020). The problems posed by the Covid-19 pandemic which have become a global problem have the potential to trigger a new social order or reconstruction (Bara, 2021). According to the survey data of the Fellowship of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) on the official website pgi.or.id dated July 18, 2020, 19.4% of respondents did not leave the house, 79.3% no longer gathered with church members, 11.4% said they remained will worship online even though the church is allowed to worship in the building. Psychologically, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the same survey showed that 73.1% of respondents were affected by indications of mild depressive symptoms, 21.9% moderate depression, 3.5% quite severe depressive symptoms, 1.5% serious depressive symptoms.

Based on the statement of the Governor of West Java, Ridwan Kamil, as many as 226 members of the Bandung Bethel Church were infected with COVID-19 according to the statement of the Governor of West Java Ridwan Kamil (Nicolas, 2020). The Pati regent announced two churches, Mr. Harianto, on September 26, 2020, as new clusters in Pati when holding a meeting with a total of 30 participants, of which 22 people were positive for COVID-19 and two of them died, according to okezone.com news. In November 2020, on the 23rd, the pastor of the HKBP DS church, who was also the Head of the HKBP Huria Teacher College (STGH) in North Sumatra, died of being positive for Covid at Tarutung Hospital (news.okezone.com). Even on Suara.com Monday, April 13, 2020, news broke about Gerald Glen, a pastor. He was infected with the coronavirus and died a month earlier, saying in his speech in front of the church congregation, "God is more significant than this dreaded virus (Covid-19), " shocking many people. The incident raises various questions, whether the faith and confession of a priest's faith in God's omnipotence is an empty faith and whether God can no longer defend His servants according to His promises.

The issue of suffering is not new in the life stories of believers recorded in the Bible and today's situation. In Jeremiah 29:11, God, through a letter from the prophet Jeremiah to God's people who are in captivity in Babylon as captives, conveys that, His plan for His people is a plan of peace and not an accident and even promises a promising future full of hope for them. How to understand and respond to the promise of God's design of peace and not an accident while His people experience suffering? Why does God allow suffering in His people? How long will God allow suffering to be experienced by His people? Could the design of peace be realized for His people? What is the basis for God's people to keep holding on to God's promises in the suffering? Why God's promised prosperity and not the elimination of suffering? So many questions need answers because they become the subject of human thought in their desire to understand the mystery behind suffering.

II. Research Methods

Qualitative research, according to Bodgan and Biklen (Hamzah, 2020), is a research procedure that produces descriptive data types in the form of speech or writing as well as the behavior of people who are observed in a context and studied from a complete and comprehensive perspective, as well as comprehensive or holistic. This study aims to reflect on suffering in the context of the Covid-19 Pandemic for believers based on Jeremiah 29:11 by choosing to use a descriptive qualitative method approach and literature analysis, collecting data through book sources including the Bible, a number of journals and various digital articles, as well as documents related to the topic under study.

III. Discussion

3.1. Genre Jeremiah 29:11

The genre of Jeremiah 29 is a long prose form whose contents are the letter of the prophet Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon and a chapter containing a historical narrative (Dachi, 2018). According to Clarke, the content of Jeremiah 29 consists of appeals to the exiles to be patient and calm in the face of suffering in Babylon for (70) years (verses 1-14) as well as messages of judgment for false prophets (verses 20-24). 23), which gives the people false hope about their return to Jerusalem soon (Taingku, 2016). According to (Holladay, 1989), Jeremiah 29:1-23 has six literary forms: The greeting form (verses 1-4,7), the command form (verses 5-6), the prohibition form (verses 8-9), the prophetic form,

salvation (verses 10-11), a form of judgment prophecy (verses 16-19, 20,15, 21-23), a form of teaching (verse 20).

Based on the above opinion, it can be concluded that Jeremiah 29:1-23 is a combination of several interconnected types, namely greetings, messages of advice, messages of orders, messages of prohibition, prophetic messages about salvation and judgment, as well as messages of comfort as well as teaching.

3.2. Reflection on Suffering in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic for Believers Based on Jeremiah 29:11

By looking at the context of Jeremiah 29:1-23, we find that the genre of verses 10 and 11 takes the form of the prophecy of salvation. The verse of Jeremiah 29:11 reads: "For I know what plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for peace and not disaster plans, to give you a future full of hope." So in reading his writings, there should be great happiness and hope among God's people. Happiness is certainly not because of the prisoner status or suffering that God's people are experiencing, but happiness because of a correct understanding of the purpose of God's plan and His faithfulness to His people. It's why His people respond correctly and accurately to the process of suffering and faithfully wait for His

The word (shalom) is found in the Old Testament approximately 230 times (Leiter, 2007). In Greek, the word is a feminine plural construct noun which can mean a design, purpose, thought or plan, illustrating that God is not a person who is surprised by an event, in other words. That what happens is in His knowledge and plan where He has complete control over whatever happens. Shalom can be associated with three main ideas: wholeness, prosperity and harmony, which can be understood in the Old Testament as greetings, peace or security without war, health, tranquility, success, good conditions, friendship and friendship, and prosperity (Taingku, 2016).

In Jeremiah 29:11, the word Shalom which precedes the word (evil), which is translated with the meaning "suffering, evil, accident, trouble," gives a clear picture of God's heart that always thinks about and longs for the best for His people. So, was the suffering God's people endured in exile a catastrophe or an accident? Does God not care and not love them because they suffer? How should believers interpret and respond to suffering both in Babylon and today in the suffering caused by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic? Suffering certainly hurts anyone who experiences it including God's people, but by understanding God's purpose and purpose, the right response can lead to certainty to the purpose of God's glorious and perfect plan.

a. Believers must remain with all their heart, soul and body in trusting in God's design and faithfulness in any conditions, including the process of suffering because they believe that God is sovereign over His plans

God is fully sovereign over His plans because everything that happens must be with His permission and in His sovereignty. Therefore, although the process may be unpleasant and sometimes seem unfair, it is part of God's best plan and is bound to bring good. So God reminds us in Jeremiah 29:11 that He knows very well what He has planned for His lovers but also emphasizes the difference between His plans and theirs as the heavens are higher than the earth, asserting that His plans cannot fail. (Isa. 55:8-11).

(Charles R. Swindoll, 2004) is correct when he says that we need to understand that God's beautiful plan is beautiful from His point of view and not from a human point of view, because from a human perspective, beautiful life is when they enjoy a comfortable life without debt and sickness, all bills are paid off. They live a happy marriage with two children who have a sweet attitude. Also, when they live a contented life or have a job with a high salary and expect blessings, success, and prosperity forever. It's no secret that no one likes or

wants to suffer. But that is a part for believers that cannot be denied even though, in essence, suffering is still painful, and it is never easy no matter how complicated humans try to practice the principles they believe. Suffering remains a mystery and, therefore, perplexing. But there must be meaning behind suffering because suffering is a process to achieve a certain goal, so it requires trust in Allah and patience from His people (Adrianus Sunarko, 2017).

God tells what humans think they need to know but also keeps things secret what He thinks humans don't need to know. Believers need to respond to trials and tribulations as part of their calling and thus do everything with an ever-present focus on God so that their faith continues to function as it should. By suffering, the purpose of God is permitted. Hence, believers need to respond in the right way because the process of suffering because God is near to those who are brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit (Ps 34:18). The Bible more clearly gives a certainty that should comfort believers in the circumstances of their suffering: "We know now that all things work together for good to those who love Him, to those who are called according to God's purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

The word "know" here shows a certainty of faith that God is in control of all aspects related to the lives of His people, then the word "everything" appears so as to emphasize that He is also working in things that seem bad even to bring out the good. Extraordinary. Best in the life of believers, those who are destined to be like Christ. Christ suffered and died on the cross for the Father's plan for the world, and we cannot be like Christ without experiencing suffering.

(Berkhof, 2021) God's sovereignty is in His relationship with His creation, so the heavens, the earth, and all things belong to Him. He is clothed with absolute authority over the angels in heaven and men on earth. He holds all things in His power and determines the end of all things as they have been ordained. He reigns as King in the truest sense, and everything depends on Him. It must serve Him. Amid any sufferer, including in the condition of the covid-19 pandemic, awareness of God's sovereignty should be the basis for believers to remain entirely dependent on God's plan and continue to see the light in the darkness.

b. Believers Are Required To Remain Aware That God's Purpose Is Related to the Salvation of His People, So They Need and Must View Suffering From God's Perspective

God's plan is not an accident for anyone because God is good and always plans the best for those he loves. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God conveyed His plan to restore His people by bringing them back to Jerusalem, the promised land, after the completion of seventy years (Jer. 29:10), giving an illustration that God has set a limit on the period of their suffering so that it can be understood that suffering is not the end of Allah's plan and there will surely be an end. The end of God's plan is salvation or "shalom" for His people, not just restoration in the physical sense, but more than spiritual restoration, namely the restoration of their relationship with God so that they can rejoice before God and enjoy His blessings without limits. Herowati said that God is faithful to His promise and allows suffering for His people because of love. It is educational for them to know and realize their identity as the chosen people so that the covenant with God is restored (Sitorus, 2018).

The Hebrew word hopeful future in the Strong's Con Bible is translated as "an expected end." The Amplified Bible (AMP) translates "... to give you hope in your final outcome". So it can be seen that God's focus is on the outcome which awaits the reward, namely the restoration and salvation of His people (Djone, 2022). As the saying goes that the result is the most important, but don't forget that although the result is the most important, the process leading to the final result is no less important, so the suffering experienced must be viewed by believers as a vital part of the plan of salvation which God provides. As Paul told Timothy

that he had ended his battle of faith well even though his blood was shed and he was on the verge of death, he "finished well" by nurturing and defending his faith so that the crown of righteousness awaits (2 Tim. 4:6-8), the promise God is finished well for the exiles in Babylon and also for believers today during the covid-19 pandemic. The believer's part is to keep looking at God and keep the faith because for a believer not to live Christ and to die gain? (Phil. 1:21) and that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, including the suffering caused by the covid-19 pandemic (Rom. 8:35-39).

IV. Conclusion

From the explanation described above, what is the reflection of suffering in the context of the Covid-19 Pandemic for believers based on Jeremiah 29:11? In the midst of the covid-19 pandemic that has lasted more than two years, there is no sign of certainty when it will end. First, believers must remain wholeheartedly, mentally and physically trusting God's design and faithfulness under any conditions, including in the process of suffering, because they believe God is sovereign over His plans. Second, believers must remain aware that God's purpose is related to the salvation of His people, so believers need and must view suffering from God's point of view.

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