



**A Spiritual Encouragement Message
May 9, 2020**

More Advice from Jeremiah

by Randall Jarrell

Nothing seems more natural than to hate those who we believe have mistreated us. But today we learn about a better way to deal with them. Note this first...“Everything the world says about human relationships is wrong!”

The world says, Get even
God says, Seek the good of those who have harmed you
The world says, Get angry
God says, Pray for them
The world says, Look for chances to make them suffer
God says, Look for chances to do good to them
The world says, Don't waste time loving bad people
God says, I want you to love them anyway.

I suppose one of the hardest commands in the Bible to obey is the command of Jesus that we should pray for our enemies (Luke 6:27). It is hard because prayer is the last thing we want to do for our enemies. Mostly, there a lot of things we would like to do to our enemies—like getting even or making them suffer like we have suffered.

Remember the background of Jeremiah 29: King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had attacked Jerusalem and sent many of the people into exile. It was a humiliating experience for the people of God. Not all of the Jews were taken to Babylon. Jeremiah was one of those who were left behind. Chapter 29 records a letter he sent from Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon in order to encourage them. We are borrowing points from that letter to encourage us in our present distress.

God's message in the letter is somewhat unexpected, The message? We need to pray for our enemies—and they need our prayers.

“Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the

Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (v. 7).

If we don't pray for our enemies, how will they ever change?

If we don't pray for our enemies, how will we ever be free from bitterness?

If we don't pray for our enemies, who will?

God says... I know that you are humiliated, discouraged and angry, but do not despair. And pray for the prosperity of Babylon. Read that last phrase of verse 7 very carefully: “If it prospers, you too will prosper.” We find ourselves caught in a bad situation at work, or at school, or at home... maybe even with brethren, or, maybe someone has hurt you deeply and it's all you can do not to strike back. With all your energy, you barely hold back the bitterness. And some of it sloshes over the top now and then.

You couldn't pray for your enemies if your life depended on it. But God says to do it anyway. That's the whole point of Jeremiah 29:7. Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace, is used three times in this verse. Besides peace, it means blessing, wholeness, completeness, the absence of conflict, prosperity.

Here is the shocking fact—at least it would have been shocking to the Jewish exiles. God ties their blessing to the blessing of the Babylonians. This seems counter-intuitive since the exiles were God's people and the Babylonians were pagans. He is really saying that Babylon is better off because they were there. This is the Old Testament version of Jesus' call for believers to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16).

Immediately one can imagine any number of objections the Jews might have raised:

“These people are pagans”

“They invaded our land”

“They destroyed our city”

“They burned down the temple we built to worship God”

“They're vile people—killers and rapists”

“Why would I want to pray for them? They don't deserve it”

That last point is certainly true. In fact, all those points were true. The Babylonians were not nice people. You really can't be a nice barbaric killer. There is no such category. To spread their kingdom, the Babylonians acted ruthlessly against anyone who dared to oppose them. Life was cheap, death was easy, and torture a means of sending a message to future foes.

God says to his discouraged, dislocated people, “I know you don't like it here, but that doesn't matter. You're going to be here for a while so settle down and make the best of it. Don't treat the Babylonians as they treated you. Seek to bless and be a blessing. And pray for the Babylonians. They certainly need the prayers. And you, my people, need to pray. As you pray, I will bless them. And in blessing them, you too will be blessed.”

Every time we are faced with a situation caused by those who we think have mistreated us, we have three options:

- 1) We can hate them with total hatred. That accomplishes nothing.
- 2) We can struggle to hold back our anger. That will emotionally exhaust us.
- 3) We can pray for God to bless them. That opens the door for God to bless us as well.

Of course, our situation is not exactly like that of these Jewish people, but the advice God gives to them is still very good when it is applied to today. Don't become bitter over our situation...pray for those in charge.