



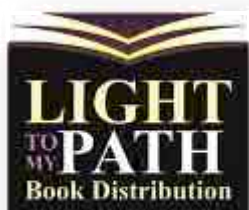
Perhaps She May Be Healed

A Christian Response
to Those who Have
Offended Us -
A Study of
Jeremiah 51:8

F. Wayne MacLeod

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Preface

Jeremiah 51:8 is a very simple verse that brings a powerful challenge. The people of God watched as their enemy, who had stripped them of life in their homeland, suffered themselves under the judgement of God. The verse speaks of how God judges sin and watches over His people. It also challenges God's people to compassion and mercy for their enemy who had so cruelly oppressed them.

This passage speaks to us as well. None of us will get through life without experiencing some hurt or offense. How does God want us to deal with those who have offended us? What are the obstacles we need to overcome as we seek to be instruments of mercy and healing for those who have offended us? These are some of the questions Jeremiah 51:8 addresses.

It is my prayer that this study will enable many who have been hurt to be released into a life of victory. May God be pleased to bless this study and use it in the lives of those who need to hear afresh this challenge.

F. Wayne Mac Leod

CHAPTER 1 - THE CONTEXT

Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken; wail for her! Take balm for her pain; perhaps she may be healed. (Jeremiah 51:8)

Over the course of this study we will take a look at the verse quoted above. Our attempt will be to examine it, break it down and apply it to our personal lives. As we begin, let me first take the time to examine the verse in its context.

Jeremiah 51:8 is a prophecy concerning Babylon. At the time of this prophetic word from Jeremiah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had captured the city of Jerusalem and had taken its inhabitants into exile. These were difficult days for God's people. The Babylonians (Chaldeans) were cruel warriors. Listen to the account of what took place in Jerusalem in those days:

17 Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand. 18 And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the

treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. 19 And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. 20 He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia. (2 Chronicles 36:17-20)

2 Chronicles 36:17-20 tells us that when the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem they slaughtered the young men in the temple and showed tremendous disrespect for the things of God. They demonstrated no compassion toward any of the inhabitants of the land but killed young and old alike. They burned down the temple of God and all important buildings in the city, taking all their treasures back with them to Babylon. They pulled down the wall around the city, leaving it defenseless. Any who escaped death were taken back to Babylon as slaves. According to 2 Kings 24:14, the only people who remained in the land of Judah were "the poorest people of the land."

We can only imagine the devastation that remained in the city of Jerusalem. In an instant it was stripped of all its inhabitants. The streets were littered with dead bodies. Buildings in which they had taken great pride were burned to the ground. Loved ones were either dead or taken captive. Those who remained alive lost everything—their land, their homes and their wealth were all gone. The aspirations of the youth for their future vanished that day. They would live out the rest of their days as slaves in a foreign land.

Jeremiah 39:6-8 goes on to tell us what happened to King Zedekiah, who reigned in Jerusalem when the Babylonians invaded:

6 The king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah at Riblah before his eyes, and the king of Babylon slaughtered all the nobles of Judah. 7 He put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains to take him to Babylon. 8 The Chaldeans burned the king's house and the house of the people, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem.

Notice the cruelty of Nebuchadnezzar in those days. The act of killing Zedekiah's sons and then taking out his eyes was intended to prolong his misery. The last thing he would see in this life would be the slaughter of those who were most precious to him.

Psalm 137 captures something of the emotional pain the people of God experienced in those days:

1 By the waters of Babylon'
There we sat down and wept,
When we remembered Zion.
2 On the willows there
we hung up our lyres.
3 For there our captors
required of us songs,
and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
4 How shall we sing the Lord's song
in a foreign land?
5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand forget its skill!
6 Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,

if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy!
Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day
of Jerusalem,
how they said, "Lay it bare, lay it bare,
down to its foundations!"
8 O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be de-
stroyed,
blessed shall he be who repays you with what you
have done to us!
9 Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones
and dashes them against the rock!

As one reads this psalm it is not difficult to see the deep pain in the hearts of God's people. There in the land of Babylon they wept (verse 1). They could not sing the songs of their homeland without deep grief in their hearts (verse 4). They missed their homeland (verses 5-6). They remembered with a deep sense of betrayal how their neighbours encouraged the Babylonians to slaughter their families and loved ones (verse 6). Notice their natural response to the pain and oppression they experienced in those days. They wanted to repay Babylon for what she had done to them (verse 8). They considered blessed the person who dashed their enemy's little ones against a rock (verse 9). The captives of that day felt intense bitterness and hatred toward Babylon for what she had done to them.

This is the context of Jeremiah 51:8. God's prophet, Jeremiah, lived in the days when this great devastation took place. He experienced the pain of this abuse. He heard the cries of God's people and the wailing of mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, and children who had lost their loved ones at the hand of Babylon. He walked through the streets of Jerusalem and smelled the stench of its dead bodies. He looked at the ruins of the temple and the walls

that surrounded Jerusalem. Maybe his clothes smelled of the smoke of burning buildings. His face may have been dirtied by the soot of what was once a glorious city. He couldn't help but feel the deep pain of his brothers and sisters over what had taken place.

We have all been hurt by someone. We have all had to face difficult situations in life. None of us are immune to pain and suffering. Jeremiah 51:8 speaks to that pain. It shows us that God sees our pain and will judge those who have hurt us. It also shows us what our response ought to be toward those who have hurt us. As we take the time to examine this verse, my prayer is that we would see its application to our personal lives and respond as God calls His people to respond in Jeremiah's day.

For Consideration:

- What took place in Jerusalem during the days of Jeremiah?
- How did the Babylonians treat the people of God? Give some examples of their cruelty?
- What was the response of God's people to what had taken place according to Psalm 137? What was their attitude toward those who hurt them?
- How have you responded toward those who have hurt you?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to consider the hardship faced by believers around the world. Ask the Lord to strengthen them and keep them in these times.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for times you have hurt a brother or sister by unkind words or deeds. Thank God that He has been patient with you.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord that He does judge sin and rebellion.

CHAPTER 2 - THE NATURE OF BABYLON'S JUDGEMENT

Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken.
(Jeremiah 51:8)

We have already seen what Babylon had done to the people of God. We can imagine what it would have been like for the people of God to be stripped of their land and forced to live in exile. Their once glorious city now lay in ruins. The temple in which they had worshipped was stripped of all its riches and now lay crumbled on the ground. The pain of losing their loved ones would linger for years. The separation from their homeland was at times almost unbearable.

God was not blind to what was happening to His people. He could see the cruelty of the Babylonians and would judge them for their sin. In fact, Jeremiah 51 is devoted to proclaiming destruction for the nation because of their sins against the people of God. Listen to what the Lord said to Babylon in Jeremiah 51:1-2:

1 Thus says the Lord:
Behold, I will stir up the spirit of a destroyer
against Babylon,

against the inhabitants of Leb-kamai,
2 and I will send to Babylon winnowers,
and they shall winnow her,
and they shall empty her land,
when they come against her from every side
on the day of trouble. (Jeremiah 51:1-2)

God was going to judge the nation of Babylon. His intention was to destroy her for her sin against His people:

11 Sharpen the arrows!
Take up the shields!
The Lord has stirred up the spirit of the kings of
the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it, for that is the vengeance of
the Lord, the vengeance for his temple. (Jeremiah 51:11)

Jeremiah was not the only one to prophecy against the nation of Babylon. Listen to what the prophet Isaiah had to say about her future:

17 Behold, I am stirring up the Medes against them,
who have no regard for silver and do not delight in gold.
18 Their bows will slaughter the young men;
they will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb;
their eyes will not pity children.
19 And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms,
the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans,
will be like Sodom and Gomorrah
when God overthrew them.
20 It will never be inhabited
or lived in for all generations;
no Arab will pitch his tent there;

no shepherds will make their flocks lie down there. (Isaiah 13:17-20)

Having understood this context, let's take a moment to examine the first part of Jeremiah 51:8 – "suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken."

Suddenly

The word "suddenly" is important. We should not think from this, however, that Babylon's judgement came unexpectedly and without announcement. We have seen that for years prior to the fall of Babylon, the prophets of the Old Testament had announced her fate. The term "suddenly" refers to how quickly she fell. It shows us just how powerless she was against the Lord God of Israel.

Babylon had been a terror to the nations around her. At the height of her power no one could match her in military strength. Jeremiah 51:8 tells us, however, that when the God of Israel stood against her, her fall was sudden. As powerful as she was, she could not stand against God—she fell helplessly before the presence of Almighty God. Listen to what Job 12:23 has to say about this God who would judge Babylon:

23 He makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations, and leads them away.

Who can stand against the Lord God of Israel? Powerful nations fall "suddenly" when He rises to judge. He laughs at their military might and wealth. When the God of Israel moves, no earthly power can stand against Him. They fall in an instant before His holy presence.

How humbling this was for Babylon, but how encouraging it was for the people of God. Their God rose to defend them. When He arose, all forces of earth, heaven and hell fell before Him. When God rose to defend His people, Babylon's fall was sudden.

Babylon has Fallen and Been Broken

Notice also that Babylon had fallen and was broken. It is important that we take the words "fallen" and "broken" together. If Babylon had simply fallen she might have been able to get back up and continue her evil path. Babylon had not only fallen but she had also been broken. The fact that she was broken indicates that she would never be the same again. There is finality to her judgement. She lay broken on the ground, and would only ever be a fraction of what she had once been. Broken Babylon was no longer a threat. She had been dealt a serious and fatal blow.

What God gives, He can also take away. We are not in control of our own destinies. Everything we have is in the hands of God. How fragile we really are. The temptation of a single moment can destroy our ministries. The decision of a split second can take away our lives. We owe our lives to the God of Israel. Were it not for his sustaining and protecting grace, where would we be today?

The God of Israel rose to judge. When he rose, Babylon fell. In an instant she was broken. Suddenly, all she had worked to achieve lay in ruins before her. What she had done to Israel now came back to trouble her. Now it was she who lay broken. It was her land that had been invaded. It was her sons and daughters who lay dead on the ground. She was helpless before the wrath of God.

As we look at this phrase: "Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken," we recognize the power of God. No force on earth or hell can stand against this power and judgement. As God rises to judge, all fall helpless at His feet. This is a stern warning for us today. We will all stand before the God who broke the nation of Babylon.

We also see in this phrase, "suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken," how the Lord God stands in defense of His people. God rises to bring justice to those who have been abused and mistreated. He knows the pain we feel and in His time, will take our defense.

For Consideration:

- What was the prophecy of Jeremiah and Isaiah concerning Babylon?
- What do we learn in this verse about the power of the Lord God of Israel? Who can stand against such power?
- What is the difference between falling and being broken? What happened to Babylon?
- What encouragement do you find in the fact that God saw what had happened to His people? Does He see your pain? Will He come to your defense?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord that He sees the injustice that takes place in our

land. Ask Him to come to the defense of those who suffer injustice.

- Thank the Lord for His power and might. Thank Him that no force in earth or hell can stand against Him. Thank Him that He is concerned for you.
- Ask the Lord to help you realize that, in an instant, all you have could be taken away. Thank Him for His wonderful grace and the blessings He has given you in this life.
- Thank the Lord that He sees your pain and the injustice you face and will come to your defense in His time.

CHAPTER 3 - THE ATTITUDE GOD REQUIRES

"Wail for her" (Jeremiah 51:8)

We have seen the cruelty of Babylon and what she had done to the people of God. We have also seen how God judged her so that she was broken in an instant. God was certainly not blind to the struggle of His people. In the right time, He came to her defense and defeated her enemy.

Put yourself in the situation of God's people in those days. You have lost everything and been taken by force to live in a foreign land. You have loved ones who died at the hands of the Babylonians. Babylon has stripped your nation of its wealth and left it in dust and ashes. God, however, has now stood up to defend His people. Suddenly, the nation that had been oppressing you fell and was broken. It lay at your feet only a fraction of what it was, humbled by God.

What would be your attitude toward Babylon as your enemy? Would there be any compassion for her in your heart? What unkind things might you be tempted to say about her now that she was being punished for what she

had done to you and your nation? What would be your response toward this cruel enemy who had made your life so miserable? To put it in more practical terms, how have you responded when someone who has offended you has fallen or is going through a difficult time themselves?

In Jeremiah 51:8 the Lord God tells His people what He expected of them in light of the terrible things that have just taken place, not only to themselves but also to Babylon under His judgement. In this chapter, we will examine the attitude God expected His people to have toward their enemy in trouble.

Notice that God told His people that they were to "wail" for Babylon. To wail, in this sense, has to do with feeling pain and grief. Israel understood what it was like to be broken. She knew what it was to suffer at the hands of her enemy. Her own experience would help her identify with the pain Babylon was going through in those days of judgement. The term "wail" brings with it an intensity of emotion and grief. To wail is much more than having a simple understanding of what someone is going through. It is to feel that pain in your own heart. It is to experience deep grief and pain for someone else's hurt. Wailing for the grief of one's enemy is not always easy. There are a number of hindrances that keep us from feeling our enemy's pain.

Pride

The first hindrance to "wailing" for our enemy is pride. Jesus told a parable in Luke 10 about a man who was going to Jerusalem and was met by robbers on the way. They beat him, stripped him of his valuables and left him half dead on the roadside. A priest passed by and saw the man but kept going on his way. A Levite also passed by and saw him but he too turned his face and went on his way

without helping him. Finally a simple Samaritan passed by and had compassion on him. He went over to him, bound up his wounds, poured oil and wine on them and took him to an inn to care for him. He even paid for the man to stay until he had recovered sufficiently from those wounds. What is significant about this parable of Jesus is that the Samaritans and the Jews were enemies. It was the Samaritan, however, who humbled himself and cared for this man in need. The priest and the Levite, were so proud that they refused even to touch the man or feel any compassion toward him.

By calling His people to wail for Babylon, God is telling them to swallow their pride and learn to feel the pain of their enemy. I have met people who had been offended by a brother or sister. When the one who offended them was suffering they were unable feel their pain. They could not go to their brother or sister in their need because they were unwilling to humble themselves and put aside past grievances. You cannot wail for your enemy's grief if you are trapped in pride.

Lack of Forgiveness

A second hindrance to "wailing" for our enemy and feeling his or her pain is a lack of forgiveness. Remember what Babylon had done to Israel. Israel had suffered great loss at the hands of this cruel enemy. She had been humiliated and her land violated. How could Israel feel Babylon's pain with so many grievances against her? Without forgiveness, Israel could never truly wail for her enemy or feel any kind of compassion for her. Instead she would only feel hatred and bitterness. By calling Israel to wail for Babylon, God is asking Israel to forgive her in order that her heart could be set free to feel her pain.

A False Sense of Justice

God grieves over the judgement of the wicked. Listen to what he says in Ezekiel 33:11:

11 Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 33:11)

Do you feel the grief in the words of God here? "Turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?" God pleads with His people to return to Him. He did not delight in punishing them. He felt deep pain in the wounds He inflicted on them for their evil.

Sometimes we feel that to express grief or compassion toward someone who is being punished by God is to justify their sin. What right do we have to ease the pain of someone who is being punished by God? We feel that doing so would be to hinder God's purpose in judging. Yet here in this passage, the Lord commanded His people to wail for Babylon, whom He had judged. He commanded them to feel her pain. He expected His people to feel compassion toward the one who had oppressed her.

A false sense of justice can keep us from feeling our enemy's grief. To believe that we should not feel the pain of our enemy is not godly. God feels deep pain in judging. In fact, God judged the nation of Edom because she rejoiced in the downfall of Israel when He judged her:

12 And you shall know that I am the Lord. "I have heard all the revilings that you uttered against the

mountains of Israel, saying, 'They are laid desolate; they are given us to devour.' 13 And you magnified yourselves against me with your mouth, and multiplied your words against me; I heard it. 14 Thus says the Lord God: While the whole earth rejoices, I will make you desolate. 15 As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so I will deal with you; you shall be desolate, Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it. Then they will know that I am the Lord. (Ezekiel 35:12-15)

What did God expect of His people when their enemy was judged? He expected them to feel her pain just as He did. He expected compassion to be stirred up within them. He expected their hearts to be broken for the grief their enemy was feeling under the wrath of God. To rejoice or be uncaring when our worst enemy is suffering is not godly. God's people were to grieve for Babylon's pain. They were to wail for her agony and feel sorrow for her distress.

What do you feel when your enemy suffers? Do you look down on him or her in pride and say: "They got what they deserved?" Have you forgiven them enough to be able to feel their grief? Do you have the heart of God as He disciplines—a heart that hurts and grieves over what He must do?

Compassion is unconditional. Compassion feels for friends and enemies alike. It does not delight in the suffering of even its worst enemy. If you are unable to wail and grieve for the pain of your enemy, you need to ask yourself what it is that keeps you from having the heart God commands His children to have in Jeremiah 51:8. May God give us grace to humble ourselves, forgive and have His attitude toward those who have offended us.

For Consideration:

- God commanded His people to "wail" for Babylon. How do you feel when your "enemy" falls under the judgement of God or goes through a difficult time in life?
- Have you ever felt that pride was keeping you from feeling the pain of someone who had hurt you?
- Take a moment to search your heart to see if there is anyone you need to forgive. How does a lack of forgiveness keep us from feeling the pain of our enemy?
- Does grieving for the pain of someone under the judgement of God mean that we do not agree with this judgement? Can we grieve for someone and not agree with their sin?
- What do we learn here about the heart of God in judgement? Do you have this heart?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to break any pride that would keep you from feeling the pain of a brother, sister or even an enemy who has offended you.
- Ask the Lord to give you forgiveness for those who have hurt you in the past. Ask Him to replace any bitterness with compassion and love.

- Thank the Lord that He does not take pleasure in judgement. Thank Him for His compassion and mercy even when He has to punish.

CHAPTER 4 - THE ACTION

GOD DEMANDS

"Take balm for her pain" (Jeremiah 51:8)

In the previous chapter we took a brief look at the attitude God expected of His people toward Babylon. Their response to Babylon's judgement, however, was to go beyond feeling sorry for her. God expected that His people do something about Babylon's pain. Let's take a moment in this chapter to consider the phrase: "take balm for her pain."

Balm was a product usually derived from trees or other plants that had medicinal value. It was used as an antiseptic or healing agent for wounds. God tells His people in Jeremiah 51:8 that they were to take balm to her enemy for the purpose of relieving her pain. Notice that this is a command.

The apostle James told his readers:

14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly

clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? (James 2:14-16)

A feeling of compassion for one's enemy does not ease his or her suffering. In Jeremiah 51:8 God calls Israel to first examine her attitudes—"wail for her." He then challenges her to take action—"take balm for her pain." In challenging Israel to take balm to Babylon, God is calling her to be actively involved in her healing.

Jeremiah 51:8 is not the only place in Scripture where the believer is commanded to minister to the needs of his or her enemies. Consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:43-44:

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor but hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Jesus illustrates this in Matthew 5:39-41 when He says:

39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

Jesus speaks here of an enemy. He tells us that we are to love and pray for our enemies. We are not to seek revenge but give generously what they ask. This same principle is repeated by the apostle Paul in Romans 12:19-20 when he says:

19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

Consider for a moment what Paul is saying here in the book of Romans. He speaks to the believers about individuals who have hurt them. He tells them never to seek vengeance but instead to be a source of blessing to those who have hurt them. He uses the illustration of heaping burning coals on the head of one's enemy. Let me explain this illustration.

In Bible times a fire was set by using coals from another fire to ignite the wood. Imagine for a moment a man whose fire has gone out on a cold night. He is cold and needs to get his fire started again. He comes to your house to ask for some coals. This particular neighbor has not been a good neighbor. In fact, he has often caused you great trouble and heartache. He stands now at your door in an hour of need asking for help. What are you to do?

Paul tells us that we are to give him the coals he needs to get his fire going again. We are to be a blessing to him in his hour of need. In fact notice particularly the phrase "heap coals on his head." This phrase is very important. Not only are we to provide this enemy with the coals necessary but we are to "heap" these coals on his head. We are to provide coals in abundance to him.

The fact that they are heaped on his head is an indication of how these coals were carried. They were carried in a basket on the head. Again this is an indication of just how great the blessing is. There was so much coal that it had

to be carried in a basket on this man's head and not in a little container carried in his hand.

This principle of ministering to the needs of one's enemy is firmly rooted in the law of the Old Testament. Consider what God told his people in Exodus 23:4-5:

4 "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. 5 If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him.

Notice that emphasis here in the fact that the donkey belongs to an enemy or "one who hates you." God commands His people to minister to those who hated them when they were in need. Inactivity was not an option. If they had the ability to do something about the problem their enemy was facing, they were obligated by God to do it.

Probably the greatest example of kindness toward an enemy is that of the Lord Jesus. Paul reminded the Romans of this in Romans 5:10 when he said:

10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life? (Romans 5:10)

When we were enemies of God, He sent His only Son to die for us on the cross so that we could be forgiven and restored. What greater example of active compassion could we find than that of the Lord Jesus? Can we, who have been treated in this way, treat our enemies with any less compassion?

This concept of practical love for an enemy brings up the question: If God is punishing and we are seeking to heal, are we not working against God? This question, while legitimate, misses the whole point of God's discipline and judgement.

Why does God judge? What is His purpose in punishing? God's ultimate purpose is not to break but to heal. God corrects us so that we can be put back on the right path. He punishes us in order that we will learn lessons. He judges so that sin is stopped and people are restored. God's whole purpose in judgement and correction is to restore people and heal their relationship with Him.

Not one of us is worthy of judging our neighbor or enemy. We, too, have sinned and are guilty before God. The only one who can truly judge is God, for He alone is perfect. While judgement belongs to the Lord, He calls us to the role of healing. He asks us to take balm to those He has disciplined. We are often the instruments through which that healing takes place.

The balm we bring to those under the judgement of God may come in the form of our words of encouragement, or perhaps in a sacrifice of time and resources for the sake of one's enemy. It will come in the form of supportive actions. The balm of our encouragement, sacrifice and support will minister to the hearts and souls of those whom God has judged, and be an instrument of healing and restoration physically, emotionally and spiritually.

God sees what forgiveness and correction will do for those who have offended us. He sees what they can be in Him. He corrects to purge them of their sin. He punishes to get them back on the right path. He uses us to bring balm of healing encouragement to them.

Will you be the instrument for healing in the life of your enemy? Will you cooperate with God in seeing this individual cleansed, corrected and restored to a relationship with their Creator? Will you bring balm to the one who has hurt you so that they can be healed? As we saw in the previous chapter, to do this requires a humbling of ourselves and a willingness to forgive. May God give us grace not only to wait for our enemy but also to bring him or her the balm they need to be completely healed.

For Consideration:

- Is feeling compassion for our enemy sufficient? What more does God ask the Israelites to do in Jeremiah 51:8?
- What is the teaching of Scripture concerning our responsibility toward an enemy in need?
- What is balm? How can you take balm to your neighbor or your enemy?
- What is God's ultimate goal in judging or punishing? What is our role in this?
- Do you have an enemy or someone who is hard to get along with? What do you think God could do in his or her life?
- What does this verse teach us about how we need to treat a brother or sister under discipline in the church?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to see more clearly the role He has for you to play in the healing of those who are suffering around you.
- Thank the Lord for the way He reached out to you when you were His enemy. Thank Him for the difference that He has made in your life. Ask Him to give you grace and the opportunity to be balm to someone you come in contact with this week.

CHAPTER 5 - THE FAITHFULNESS GOD REQUIRES

... perhaps she may be healed (Jeremiah 51:8)

The focus of this study has been to examine what the Lord was saying to His people in Jeremiah 51:8 about their response to the judgement of Babylon. In the last two chapters we examined the attitude God required and the action He demanded. Let's take a moment now to conclude with a word about the faithfulness God expected from His people in this regard.

Notice from the final words of this verse the purpose of Israel's efforts toward Babylon —"perhaps she may be healed." This tells us something very important. God had been judging Babylon because of her cruelty towards His people. God's desire in judging, however, was not simply to seek revenge for His people, but that Babylon would be healed of the sin and rebellion that ravaged her nation. God expected Israel to share in that purpose. He called her to wail and bring balm so that Babylon could experience that healing and be set free from her rebellion.

For Israel to be part of this healing she needed to forgive Babylon. She needed to stop looking at her own pain and see the agony of her enemy. She needed to be freed from any sense of vengeance. This is not something that comes naturally to us as human beings. To have this attitude we need a powerful work of God's Spirit in our lives cleansing us from wrong attitudes and motivations. We will need Him to replace our bitterness with love and compassion. God's people could not be part of the healing of Babylon if they did not share God's heart for Babylon. The first step toward being faithful to God in this matter was to have Him change their hearts toward those who had so cruelly oppressed them.

Notice two important words in the final section of Jeremiah 51:8. The words "perhaps" and "may" indicate that healing is not always possible. Our acts of compassion and tenderness will not always guarantee healing. Sometimes those we minister to resist the work of God and our efforts to show compassion and kindness. They may even take advantage of our love. The Lord Jesus touched many people in His earthly ministry but those same people turned their back on Him and crucified Him on the cross. What is important for us to note here is that while healing may not take place, the command to wail and take balm remains in effect. God's people were to faithfully seek the healing of those who may never be healed. They were to minister whether they saw results or not.

Notice what Jeremiah 51:9 says:

9 We would have healed Babylon,
but she was not healed.
Forsake her, and let us go
each to our own country,

for her judgment has reached up to heaven
and has been lifted up even to the skies.

Verse 9 tells us that Babylon would not be healed. Ultimately, she would be judged for her sin and never be restored. Her heart would be hardened to the things of God and to the efforts of His people to minister to her pain.

If you knew that an individual would never come to the Lord through your efforts, would you still minister to them? God expected His people to seek the healing of Babylon even though she would never be healed. He expected them to spend their resources and energy to bring balm to her even though that balm would have no effect. Many people would see this as a waste of time and resources. The faithfulness God expects of us, however, is not motivated by results. We are to serve and minister because it is the right thing to do.

The faithfulness God expected of His people was not about results but about demonstrating His character and heart. Jesus touched many who would never receive Him. He healed the sick, cast out demons and spent time with individuals who would ultimately reject Him. He knew the hearts of these individuals, but He still reached out to them. He was not motivated by results, but by love and compassion toward His enemies.

After all Israel's efforts, Babylon would continue to hate her. God knew this would happen. In fact Jeremiah prophesied that this would happen in the very same passage (Jeremiah 51:9). Israel's motivation in ministering to Babylon, however, was to be completely apart from results. She was to be faithful to walk in obedience to the command of God and demonstrate His heart whether people accepted this or not.

God's people were to faithfully seek the healing of Babylon. They were to wail, bring balm and leave the results to God. By reaching out to the enemy in compassion and mercy, Israel was showing Babylon the gracious nature of God. Faithfulness to what God had called her to do would not be measured by how many Babylonians turned to God. It would be measured by how much she demonstrated the character of her Creator through her attitudes and actions. Israel's response to Babylon in this time of distress would be a powerful witness to the character of God.

The kind of faithfulness God expects, demands that we search our souls. It requires that we surrender any attitude that would keep us from clearly demonstrating the heart of God in this world of sin. It calls for a willingness to be obedient when we see no fruit for our labors or when trouble rises up against us. It is a commitment to be a true reflection of God in whatever situation comes our way. This was the heart of God for His people in Jeremiah 51:8.

Will you take up this challenge today? Will you commit yourself to be a reflection of God and His character in whatever situation comes your way? Will you let God search your heart to cleanse it of any impurities so you can more clearly reflect His image? Will you make it your commitment to judge your success or failure not in terms of results but in terms of how faithfully and obediently you have demonstrated the heart and character of God?

For Consideration:

- What was the desire of God for Babylon according to Jeremiah 51:8?

- Could Israel have been truly faithful to God in her ministry to Babylon if she did not examine her own sinful attitudes toward the enemy? How important is our attitude in ministry? How does our attitude affect our ministry to other people?
- Would Babylon be healed? Were Israel's efforts wasted?
- Can we be faithful and not see any results for our efforts? Can we see results and not be faithful?
- How much does your life reflect the heart and character of God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is a God of compassion and mercy. Thank Him for how He has demonstrated this toward you.
- Ask the Lord to examine your heart and show you any attitudes or sin that keeps you from being a true reflection of His character.
- Ask God to help you to be faithful whether or not you see results for your actions.

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