

Turn The Other Cheek:

As part of the famous 'Sermon on the Mount', we read that Yeshua said to 'turn the other cheek':

"You have heard that our fathers were told, 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you not to stand up against someone who does you wrong. On the contrary, if someone hits you on the right cheek, let him hit you on the left cheek too! – Matthew 5:38-39 (CJB)

While the 'eye for an eye' passage in the Tanakh (see Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; and Deuteronomy 19:21) is well known, I believe it is seriously misunderstood, as I explain in my '**An Eye for an Eye or Measure for Measure**'¹.

However, I wish to focus on the 'turn the other cheek' teaching.

The brilliant Professor David Flusser, in my opinion, had perhaps the most intimate and accurate understanding of the Yeshua ben Yosef that anyone has had, since the First Century of the Common Era.

Flusser argued that all of Yeshua's teaching could be found in the Tanakh or other earlier Jewish writings (while not trying in any way to diminish the power and authority of Yeshua's words).

For example he wrote: *"From ancient Jewish writings we could easily construct a whole Gospel without using a single word that originated with Jesus."*²

Yet, it is not always easy to verify Flusser's argument.

Some are very subtle. For example Yeshua states in Mathew 23:23a: *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: **justice and mercy and faithfulness.** ..."*

It may not be obvious to all but I believe he was quoting Micah 6:8 here which states that:

*"He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you **But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?**"³ - NKJV*

But what of this 'turn the other cheek' teaching and effectively to bless those who curse you? Or as Yeshua added: *"If someone wants to sue you for your shirt, let him have your coat as well!"*. That is, if someone is taking something precious from you, do not fight this, but bless them even more!

Well the prophet Jeremiah shares a very similar message to the Babylonian exiles when they first arrive in Babylon.

I had not seen this message. At least I don't recall it sinking in in the many, many times I have read Jeremiah 29. This may be because this chapter goes on to offer a couple of real gems that I have often focussed on.

It is in Jeremiah 29 that we read: *"For I know what plans I have in mind for you," says Adonai, 'plans for well-being, not for bad things; so that you can have hope and a future.'* - Jer 29:11

And one of my all-time favourites: *"You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart"* - Jer 29:13

¹ <http://circumcisedheart.info/measureformeasure.pdf> and for more on this topic see 'Feeling for Rebekah - <http://circumcisedheart.info/Feeling%20for%20Rebekah.pdf>

² For detail see <http://circumcisedheart.info/The%20Times%20of%20Yeshua.pdf>

³ To 'walk humbly with your God' is to trust Him to provide, and therefore to walk with quiet assurance in His Instructions. This is true 'faithfulness'.

But recently I was listening to Prof Cynthia Chapman narrate her book *'The World of Biblical Israel'*, when she alluded to this very chapter and portion:

¹ *These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.*

² *This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers had departed from Jerusalem.*

³ *The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiyah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. It said:*

⁴ *"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:*

⁵ *Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce.*

⁶ *Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.*

⁷ ***But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.***

⁸ *For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream,*

⁹ *for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD.*

¹⁰ *"For thus says the LORD: **When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.***

¹¹ *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

¹² *Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.*

¹³ *You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.*

¹⁴ *I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile." – Jeremiah 29:1-14*

She explained that the God of Israel had, through His prophet Jeremiah told these people who had just wept bitterly beside the rivers of Babylon and even promised to bring evil upon their captors.

We read of their pain and anger in Psalm 137:

"1. By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept as we remembered Zion ...

8 Daughter of Babylon, you will be destroyed! A blessing on anyone who pays you back for the way you treated us! 9 A blessing on anyone who seizes your babies and smashes them against a rock!"

Yet, here's Jeremiah telling them to bless these sons and daughters of Babylon, their captors. To repeat, he turns the whole attitude around and calls them to *"... seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."*

If this isn't 'turning the other cheek'; 'going the extra mile' and giving 'not just your shirt but your coat as well' then I don't know what is!

And how did it all turn out? Just as prophesied they returned some 70 years later and were very much supported by the Babylonians to do so.

Not only this; but a great many stayed on in Babylonia, and it became a great centre for Jewish learning for centuries to come. It is in fact the Babylonian Talmud that has been the main source of Jewish jurisprudence for the entire Diaspora until the last century (rather than the Jerusalem Talmud⁴).

So this '*turning the other cheek*' turned out to be a good thing for the exiled Jewish people, and helped to fulfil the promise that God had "... *plans for* (their) *welfare and not for evil*," and to give them "... *a future and a hope*".

Update:

A friend and fellow Bible student directed me to Lamentations 3:28-30

"28 Let him sit alone in silence when he has laid it on him.

29 Let him submit absolutely; there may yet be hope.

30 Let him offer his (other) cheek to the one who strikes it and receive his fill of insults."

When Yeshua was confronted in the garden, arrested and taken before his accusers, he did indeed heed his own advice and remain silent, not reacting to their insults and aggression.

Yeshua's '*turn the other cheek*' teaching, is clearly a teaching from this very passage in Lamentations.

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⁴ Dr. David Neiman explains this is fascinating detail in his 'The Jews in History'.