



# The **Fiery** Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

---

Text

Jeremiah 18:18-23

Topic

Jeremiah is so overwhelmed by the news his life is in danger that he starts praying against the people of Judah

Title

*"You Can't Handle the Trial"*

Introduction

The Rev. Wiley Drake, pastor of the First Southern Baptist Church in Buena Park, told Fox News Radio earlier this month that he was practicing "imprecatory prayer" that would bring about President Obama's death.

"So you're praying for his death?" asked the show's host, Alan Colmes.

"Yes."

"So you're praying for the death of the president of the United States?"

“Yes.”

A district court judge in Dallas ruled it legal for people to pray curses on others as long as there is no threat or harm caused to the cursed person.

Mikey Weinstein, the founder of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, sued former Navy chaplain Gordon Klingenschmitt who had invoked curses upon him. Weinstein claimed the imprecatory prayers caused various threats and damages to his family and property.

Should Christians ever invoke curses by praying imprecatory prayers for their enemies?

To 'imprecate' means *to invoke evil upon or curse one's enemies*. It is a real type of prayer as there are numerous examples of it in the Bible. King David, in the psalms, often used phrases like, “may their path be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them” (Psalm 35:6) and “O God, break the teeth in their mouths; tear out the fangs of the young lions, O LORD!” (Psalm 58:6).

More to the point, Jeremiah prays an imprecatory prayer in our text. In verses twenty-one through twenty-three he asks God to allow terrible things to happen to the people of Judah, including the women and children.

We're going to talk about *if* and *when* you can imprecate. Along the way we are going to see something else, something that I think will be of far greater personal spiritual impact.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Imprecate Only If You Are In The Most Severe Difficulty, and #2 Imprecate Only When You Are In The Most Spiritual Disposition.

#1 Imprecate Only If  
You Are In The Most Severe Difficulty  
(v18-20)

Jeremiah came to the realization that there was an organized plot against him.

Jeremiah 18:18 Then they said, "Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come and let us attack him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words."

There must have been a secret meeting in which a strategy was devised to discredit Jeremiah. They would actively "attack him with the tongue," with slander; and they would go out of their way so as to not "heed... any of his words."

The "law... the wise... and the word from the prophet" might correspond to the three main divisions of the Old Testament - the Law, the Wisdom Literature, and the Prophets. They were thus claiming to be people of God's Word while simultaneously devising evil plans against one of God's servants.

The the priests, the scribes, and the prophets had their message; Jeremiah had his. *They couldn't both be right!* You could judge who was right by the content of the message and by the character of the messengers.

If what you or someone else is doing is contrary to God's Word, then it's wrong. No matter how much a person claims to love God, if they ignore His Word they either have never known Him or they have left their first love.

A double-barreled campaign of slander and indifference was a powerful attack upon a prophet. I've discovered over the years that not only are there plots against you, evil plots by evil forces, but that they seem to know right where it hurts the most. Where it will get your eyes off of the Lord, crippling you spiritually.

The plans against Jeremiah were even more sinister than slander.

Jeremiah 18:19 Give heed to me, O Lord,  
And listen to the voice of those who contend with me!  
Jeremiah 18:20 Shall evil be repaid for good?  
For they have dug a pit for my life.  
Remember that I stood before You  
To speak good for them,  
To turn away Your wrath from them.

"They have dug a pit for my life" means the end game was to eliminate Jeremiah. Imprisonment was one he could be eliminated way but murder couldn't be ruled out. In verse twenty-three Jeremiah says, "their counsel is to slay me."

For his part Jeremiah had interceded for these wicked people, asking God to withhold His judgment against them. With their plot against him revealed, Jeremiah went from *intercessory* prayer to *imprecatory* prayer.

When do **we** go from intercession to imprecating? Let's notice a few things.

First (and foremost) you can only imprecate when that is also God's revealed will. God had been telling Jeremiah all along He was definitely going to allow the Babylonian armies to destroy and burn Jerusalem and carry away its citizens as captives. He had even told Jeremiah to quit interceding for them. Imprecatory prayer was appropriate.

Second, Jeremiah was in this trouble because he was serving the Lord in a righteous cause. For his part he was innocent of any wrongdoing. So you can only honestly pray an imprecatory prayer if you are blameless in the situation. Imprecatory prayer isn't something you have as an ace-in-the-hole to win arguments and disputes.

Third, the trouble Jeremiah was in, the trial, was severe in that his very life was at stake. Imprecatory prayer, it would seem, is reserved for the most severe trials in which your enemies literally seek your life.

If you find yourself innocent of all wrongdoing being mortally attacked by relentless enemies whom God has told you He is definitely going to deliver to destruction, **then by all means quit interceding for them and start imprecatory prayers.**

You might, therefore, want to think twice about praying against run-of-the-mill nonbelievers - even if they are the heads of anti-Christian organizations. And you have no biblical support for praying that the president of the United States would die.

Before we move forward in the text I want us to think about the severity of Jeremiah's trial. Some commentators fault him for going imprecatory, saying it was a backslide into depression.

Others point to imprecatory prayers elsewhere in the Bible and say he was perfectly justified in his behavior.

While that debate goes on, what **we** can say is that this trial overwhelmed him - so much that he saw as a real option that God would smite his enemies. He was surrounded by sin and idolatry; his message was purposely being ignored and, in fact, the opposite of what he said was being done; he personally was being slandered; his life was in constant grave danger; if he survived he would suffer along with the rest of the Jews as a casualty or captive of an invading army. I think it's safe to say Jeremiah was heavily burdened.

Has anyone ever told you, or have you ever told anyone, that "God won't give you more than you can handle?" The biblical support given for that is usually First Corinthians 10:13, **No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.**

That is indeed a glorious promise. What it is promising is that when you are tempted to sin you need never yield to the temptation. You will always find a "way of escape" that you may "bear" the temptation without succumbing to it.

Isn't that wonderful? Even though you are up against the devil using the world to tempt your flesh, you need not fall into his traps but can escape without sinning.

What that doesn't say, not really, is that "God won't give you more than you can handle" in terms of your trials. The truth is, your trials **ARE** more than **YOU** can handle. If you could handle them they wouldn't be trials.

Anyone who has ever genuinely suffered will tell you it was more than they could handle. It is in that moment that the Christian can count on God to handle it for them - for His strength to be made perfect in their weakness.

If you don't believe me, you will believe the apostle Paul who said, *For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us (Second Corinthians 1:8-10).*

Its spiritually dangerous to think "God won't give you more than you can handle." It's spiritually glorious to realize there's nothing He can't handle.

#2 Imprecate Only When  
You Are In The Most Spiritual Disposition  
(v21-23)

Let's get back to Jeremiah's imprecatory prayer. Here it is.

Jeremiah 18:21 Therefore deliver up their children to the famine,  
And pour out their blood  
By the force of the sword;  
Let their wives become widows  
And bereaved of their children.  
Let their men be put to death,  
Their young men be slain  
By the sword in battle.

Jeremiah 18:22 Let a cry be heard from their houses,  
When You bring a troop suddenly upon them;  
For they have dug a pit to take me,  
And hidden snares for my feet.

Jeremiah 18:23 Yet, Lord, You know all their counsel  
Which is against me, to slay me.  
Provide no atonement for their iniquity,  
Nor blot out their sin from Your sight;  
But let them be overthrown before You.  
Deal thus with them  
In the time of Your anger.

After you get over the initial shock that tender Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, can utter such a strong imprecation you notice a few things.

You notice that he was talking about the eventual judgment God had prophesied - the Babylon siege and captivity. He wasn't asking God to nuke his enemies right now but only to not relent of the judgment He had formed for them.

Even though Jeremiah was in immediate personal danger he was looking past it to God's ultimate judgment. Imprecatory prayer is patient, waiting for the Lord to act according to His plans and purposes.



Or we might say it requires we learn to be patient as we wait for God to act.

Along those lines, when we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus," it's sort of an imprecatory prayer because when the Lord comes again to resurrect and rapture the church it will be followed by the seven year Great Tribulation - which is most definitely a time in which the enemies of God will be subject to many terrible judgments from Heaven.

Another thing to notice is that God is longsuffering. There was no doubt the people of Judah deserved the things Jeremiah outlined that were coming, and that they deserved them right now. But his ministry would last a total of forty years. Lots of terrible things would happen to Jeremiah and to others during those years. Still God's longsuffering waited for any who might turn to Him because, after all, an eternity suffering in Hell is a whole lot worse than any amount of earthly suffering.

God remains longsuffering today, not willing that any should perish but that they would instead receive eternal life.

Let's put that into perspective. Something awful is happening right now, somewhere. Should God stop it? One day He will... But when He steps in to permanently stop the evil men do to each other by their own free choice it will be too late to repent and receive eternal life. So His longsuffering waits and He gets blamed for every awful thing men do of their own free will.

Jeremiah's disposition was extremely spiritual. He was walking in sync with the Lord and His will. He wasn't calling for revenge. He wasn't praying out of anger.

We tend to be more like James and John who, before Jesus died and rose from the dead, were nicknamed "the sons of thunder." Once when the people of Samaria rejected Jesus they asked Him if they could call down fire from Heaven to consume them - the way Elijah did in his contest with the false prophets of Baal.

Jesus said "No" and told them they were not of that spirit. Neither are we. We are to pray for our enemies and that mostly means intercessory prayer, in the spirit of our Lord, Who is really not willing any should perish.

We will rarely, if ever, be in a situation like Jeremiah's that calls for imprecatory prayer. **Keep interceding!**

We **will** find ourselves feeling overwhelmed in our trials. You can't handle them but they are never more than God can handle. Cast your care upon Him because He cares for you.