

By Nora Arsenian Carmi

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## Text

Jeremiah 6:13-15

Isaiah 57

Luke 19:41

Micah 6:8

Ephesians 6:11-17

## Reflection

Justice and Peace has been a recurring fundamental concern through the centuries, from religious circles dependent upon scriptures to secular world movements trying to implement these concepts based on international moral values and laws. Therefore, it is only natural that Global Ministries included Justice and Peace as one of the four themes of the Middle East Initiative, especially in these troubled times in and around the region where strife and injustice have hindered the achievement of peace, or even semblance of peace.

Palestine is no exception. The land of scriptures and prophets has neither known justice nor peace, not in past centuries, nor in the more recent history, in which the United Nations was to ensure the cessation of wars and respect of human rights for all.

Dr. Mary Mikhail's bible study entitled *Justice and Peace-on Syria* (September 2015) reminds us **that justice/righteousness is the moral standard by which God measures human conduct: it is a basic requirement to peace which comes with doing the Will of God.**

Before Christianity, prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah, our forefathers in this land, dared to warn the people about the consequences of what lack of justice/righteousness could lead to.

Jeremiah rightfully described the situation when he wrote: *"For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain, and from prophet to priest everyone deals falsely. They have treated the wound of my people carelessly saying: peace, peace when there is no peace. They acted shamefully, they committed abomination: yet they were not ashamed"* (Jer. 6:13-15)

Jeremiah, the prophet of Anatot, (modern Anata, near Jerusalem) did not only speak about the invasion of the land by the Babylonians, forewarning exile and the destruction of Jerusalem. It is not only the injustice of the invader and the occupier he is referring to. He was also pointing out the unjust attitude of both political and religious authority "everyone dealing falsely." Justice towards widows, orphans and the "stranger" was an obligation not to be violated. The disdainful, shameful violations in the treatment of other human beings were and are unacceptable.

In chapter 57 of Isaiah, the prophet foretells that the righteous do not get immediate recognition and are not uplifted in a world of injustice. They may not even be appreciated within their own circles: *"The righteous perish and no one takes it to heart, the devout are taken away while no one understands"*. But the Almighty has other plans: *"For the righteous are taken away from calamity and they enter into peace"* (Isaiah 57:1-2). And God will heal all because Peace is the goal, the end result of God's purpose for humanity. *"Peace, peace to the far and the near says the Lord: and I will heal them"* (Isaiah 57:19)

How many times do the scriptures remind us of God's patience and love and readiness to give opportunities for repentance? God is good, but *"There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked"* (Isaiah 57:21).

What happened to the clear advice: *"He has told you, O mortal what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to know kindness and to walk humbly with your God?"* (Micah 6:8).

Why then do we wonder that our Lord and Savior cried over and in Jerusalem: *"If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."* (Luke 19:41).

Translated in our context today, the déjà vu atmosphere continues....

Israel is the occupying power and though the political leadership proclaims "peace, peace, there is no peace." God's land, termed holy, continues to be torn apart and is plunged in injustice and inequity. God's beautiful creation is destroyed, the environment is depleted, natural resources monopolized for one group of people, trees uprooted and burnt, homes demolished, innocent people imprisoned, tortured and killed, basic human rights denied and access even to worship for the occupied Palestinians conditional. The commandment of love, as well as universal laws and human rights, are trampled upon; the sanctity of life is destroyed, and the Word of God is distorted and manipulated for personal greed and power. In the land where God met humanity, where the gift of incarnation occurred and the message of peace was proclaimed to remind the world of God's unconditional love, of opportunities to repent and do justice, chaos and death reign. Compassion and mercy are non-existent. The heavy yoke of an oppressive occupation and an unjust power reminds us that Paul in his letter to the Ephesians implied that our *"struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against authorities and spiritual powers of evil."* In the past months, we have witnessed excessive extrajudicial killings in Bethlehem where Jesus was born, in Jerusalem where he was crucified and rose in eternal life, and in all the land termed holy. People are resisting and raising their voices demanding justice and calling upon peacemakers to stand in solidarity through prayerful actions and all forms of creative non-violent advocacy.

How will healing come when we have not learnt that justice is sharing, respecting and accepting that we are all created in the image of God though we may worship and glorify the Creator in different ways? Will we take up the whole armor of God *"so that we may be able to withstand on that evil day and having done everything to stand firm. Therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on your breastplate of righteousness, As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace, With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication."* (Ephesians 6:13-18)

Why cannot the people of all faiths learn to do the will of God, especially in this "promising land"?

## **Prayer**

Loving and merciful God,

We, the oppressed, the discouraged and weary whose lives are dominated by violence and mistrust, we implore you.

We, the children, farmers and families who live in fear of those who rely on the force of arms and deny us the rights to live securely and in dignity, we cry out to you.

Have mercy on us and lend us your healing touch so that we can stand firm and work for justice that will lead to peace for all the children of God.

## **Questions**

1. Why is justice and peace so important in Palestine/Israel?
2. Are justice and peace possible in Palestine/Israel today?
3. Who can help in achieving it?
4. What is the role of the Church in peacemaking?

## **About the Author**

*Nora Arsenian Carmi is an Armenian Palestinian from Jerusalem. She is committed to witnessing her faith through services in the community and working for justice and peace.*

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