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The Prophets Prophecy Lies, The Priests Rule By Their Own Authority, and My People Love It This Way **5: 20-31**

The prophets prophecy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and My people love it DIG: What was wrong with the people's perspective? What had become the prevailing attitude about ADONAI (5:12, 22-24)? Why did the harvests fail in Judah? Why don't these men fear God? What were the characteristics of the wicked people condemned by Jeremiah? Which of Judah's failings do you think angers God the most? Do you think Ha'Shem gets as angry as Jeremiah tells it?

REFLECT: Who do you think are false prophets today? What is their lie? How do they "profit?" People in Yirmeyahu's day were blind to their faults and easily led to presume their innocence. Who do you have in your life that will be honest enough with you to help you see your "spiritual blind spots?"

During the reign of Josiah

Yirmeyahu warned **the Israelites** about **their** persistent rejection of YHVH's boundaries for **them**. Throughout this whole passage **Ha'Shem** addresses **the people** as a frustrated teacher might address rebellious students: **Announce this to the descendants of Jacob** (the northern Kingdom) **and proclaim it in Judah** (the southern Kingdom). **Again the whole nation is addressed: Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear (5:20-21). This phrase occurs almost word-for-word in Psalm 115:4-6, where it refers to idols. It was possibly a colloquial proverb, and here applied by Jeremiah to the people, reasoning that idolatry makes its devotees like the idols themselves (2:5).** Because **hear** is the foundational word for covenant responsiveness (**Deuteronomy 6:4**), **5:21** moves from *shema* to *shema*: **Hear . . . you who will not hear.**

Near historical: **Judah** was spiritually dead. **Should you not fear Me (Proverbs 1:7)? declares the LORD. Should you not tremble in My presence? The omnipotence of**

God is so obviously confirmed by nature. Will it have no effect on people? Even **the sea** knows its **boundaries**. **ADONAI** is sovereign: **I made the sand a boundary for the sea, an everlasting barrier it cannot cross. The waves may roll, but they cannot cross it (5:22).** Even **the mighty sea**, that old symbol of chaos (**Genesis 1:2**), has been put in its place by **YHVH** and does not break through the permanent **barrier** of **sand** that is **its boundary**. But **the covenant people** are seen as constantly breaking through the boundary of the Torah that **the LORD** had set for them.⁷⁶

Yet this people has defiled YHVH and ignored the purpose for which He chose them! There was no **fear** of **God**, who gave **them** rain for **their** crops. **But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside (Hebrew: *saru*) away. They do not say to themselves, “Let us fear ADONAI our God, who gives autumn and spring rains in season, exactly when they are needed (the productivity of the land) who assures us of the regular weeks of harvest (5:23-24). As the LORD’s infinite power does not arouse fear within them; they also blind themselves to their dependence upon Him for their very food and survival.**

As difficult as it is for us to appreciate, the notion in the TaNaKh is that human **fear** of **God** is a good thing; and we cannot water **fear** down to “reverence.” It really is **fear**, as the parallel **tremble** above indicates. Undoubtedly, **Yirmeyahu** had in mind proverbial sayings such as: **The fear of ADONAI is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline (Proverbs 1:7 CJB).** Everyone has **fears**. Why not choose a life-giving **fear . . . the fear of God?**

Your crimes have overturned nature’s rules, your sins have kept back good from you (5:25 CJB). Because **Judah** has turned away from **God . . .** these blessings have been withheld (**Deuteronomy 28:15-28**). Obedience brings blessings, but disobedience will withhold material blessings and bring on persecution.

There are those today within the Church who use principles found in the TaNaKh for **Isra’el** to justify their “health-and-wealth” theology. But the promises **God** made to **Isra’el** are sometimes exactly opposite to promises **He** makes to the Church. For example, if **Isra’el** obeys, **she** will have material prosperity. But to the Church, the Bible says that not very many will be rich, and the more the Church conforms to **God’s** standard, the more persecution will come.

Among My people are the wicked who lie in wait. The verb is singular; each one of them crouches, waiting for their victim. And like men who snare birds and like those who set traps to catch people (5:26). They hide from view and wait for an unwary

passer-by. **They** do not hesitate to add murder to robbery if, in **their** opinion, necessity demands it (**Psalm 56:6; Proverbs 1:11**).

The terrible contrast between the fat, sleek **rich** and the helpless poor is seen. **They** grew **rich on deceit**. **Like cages full of birds, their houses are full of deceit; they have become rich and powerful (Psalm 37 and 73) and have grown fat (Deuteronomy 32:15) and sleek on the backs of the poor (5:27-28a)**. **They** fail to uphold the demands of the Torah, like loving **their** neighbor, taking care of the widows and the needy. Had **they** done these things **they** would have received **their** prosperity from **the LORD**. But **their** prosperity was not from **God**, but from **their** own **deceit**.

Their evil deeds have no limit; they do not seek justice. They do not promote the case of the fatherless; they do not defend the just cause of the poor (5:28b).

Ha'Shem's yearning to forgive has turned to harshness. What kind of a covenant community is this, where **the rich** take advantage of **the poor**? **He** asks some ominous questions: **Should I not punish them for this? Should I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this (5:29, also see 5:9 and 9:9)? This is a repetition of 5:9 as though it was a refrain. Such acts of injustice do not merely wrong other people, but are also an insult to YHVH that must be avenged. Evil against mankind is also evil against God.**



The people had grown so accustomed to such thinking that it had become normal with them, but to God a horrible and shocking thing had happened in the Land. The prophets prophecy lies, the priests' rule by their own authority, and My people love it this way. The priests had the responsibility of knowing when the prophets were prophesying falsely or truthfully. Yet the priests were the very ones who were following what the false prophets were saying. The shocking thing was that the people loved it that way and submitted without a protest. But what will you do in the end when retribution comes (5:30-31)? By the end of **Chapter 5** it is obvious that **the search** for a

faithful person that begun in **5:1** is a total failure.

God has given us moral boundaries in **His** Word for us to live within. **He** gave them not to frustrate us, but so that by keeping within them we may enjoy **His** blessings. King David wrote: **I know, ADONAI, that Your rulings are righteous, that even when You humble me you are faithful (Psalm 119:75 CJB).** YHVH told Isra'el through Moshe: **I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life (Deuteronomy 30:19).** Don't test **Ha'Shem's boundaries** and invite **His** correction. Have faith and make **His** Word the engine of your life and not the caboose.