

Your Sword Has Devoured Your Prophets Like a Lion 2: 29-37

DIG: Why did the backslidden followers try to turn the judgment against them back toward God? Why did they try to deflect blame? What did they claim as proof of their innocence? Read Psalms 37 and 73 and Matthew 5:45. What do these passages reveal about the relationship between prosperity and the blessing of YHVH. What should the LORD's goodness have led the people toward (see Luke 15:17-18 and Romans 2:4-5)?

REFLECT: How good are you at taking responsibility for your sins? Are you quick to ask for forgiveness to those you have offended? To God? Or do you deflect by blaming others? When was the last time you stood up and took responsibility for something you did? When was the last time you deflected and blamed others? Is doing the right thing a one time act, or a pattern of behavior? Which path do you think you're headed down?

616 BC during the reign of Josiah

Judah had become spiritually irresponsible. Written during Josiah's reign in a time of relative prosperity and tranquility, God wastes no time putting the blame squarely where it belongs. Why do the people bring a case against Him when they are the ones who have rebelled? The fact is they have none. YHVH then says the Israelites have not listened to Him. The prophets He sent had been put to the sword.⁴⁴

Why do you bring charges against Me? You have all rebelled against Me, declares ADONAI (2:29). Once again, we have law-court terminology. The expression bring charges against (Hebrew: *rib*) is a legal word and suggests that the people wanted to bring a legal lawsuit against YHVH, though the grounds for such a suit are not specified. But God would not accept the validity of the charges, and, in fact, brings His own *rib* against Judah. She, in fact, had no case, or defense, against these legal charges against her.⁴⁵

In vain I punished your people; they did not respond to correction. Your sword has devoured your prophets like a ravenous lion (2:30). This alludes to Zechariah (Second Chronicles 24:20) and Isaiah, who, according to tradition, suffered martyrdom at the hands of Manasseh. All previous discipline had been ineffective. So now the LORD sees the need to move from discipline to punishment (after the exile this is admitted in Nehemiah 9:26 and Jeremiah 26:20-23).

Judah's irresponsibility showed up most clearly in her forgetfulness of ADONAI's past dealings. You of this generation, consider the word of the LORD, "Have I been a desert to Isra'el (have I failed to provide for your needs) or a land of great darkness? The Hebrew *mapelyah*, literally darkness of YHVH, like *shallhebethyah* literally the very flame of ADONAI (Cant. 8.6). In other words, God did not leave Isra'el to grope in the darkness without guidance. Why do My people say, "We are free to roam: we will come to You no more" (2:31). Again, the fault did not rest with ADONAI. He provided the manna in the desert (see the commentary on Exodus Cr - I Will Rain Down Manna from Heaven for You), and when the plague of darkness came, Goshen had light (see the commentary on Exodus Bs - Moses Stretched Out His Hand Toward the Sky and Total Darkness Covered All Egypt For Three Days).

Then Ha'Shem demonstrated Judah's illogical thinking by contrasting what she forgets and what women generally do not forget. Already knowing the answer, He asks: Does a young woman forget her jewelry (or those things that mark a woman as not being married)? No! Does a bride her wedding ornaments (the noun *kishshurim* occurs in Isaiah 3:20 and means a sash worn around the waist and was the mark of a married woman)? No! Women do not forget these things, yet My people have forgotten Me, days without number (2:32). God is as indispensable to Y'hudah, indeed the source of her glory, as these adornments to a maid or to a bride. YHVH had not forgotten Judah. No, it was the other way around. Judah had forgotten her Maker.

As a result, Y'hudah sarcastically concluded that she had become an expert prostitute. How skilled you are at pursuing illicit love! Therefore, the Hebrew word *lachen* introduces an oath of affirmation. Therefore, even the worst of women can learn from your ways (2:33). This was a very common motif for Isra'el in the prophets, especially Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea.

Another indication of her irresponsibility was Y'hudah's involvement in the shedding of innocent blood. Then Judah moved from a prostitute to a murderer. On your clothes is found the lifeblood of the innocent poor (Second Kings 21:16), though you did not catch them breaking in, which might have justified defending yourself (Exodus 22:2-3). The poor people that she killed were not guilty of anything. Yet in spite of all this you say, "I am innocent; surely He is not angry with me." All is well with me; this proves my innocence since I evidently enjoy the blessing of YHVH. But I will pass judgment on you because you say, "I have not sinned" (2:34-35).

A fourth indication of Judah's irresponsibility was her long history of unfaithfulness.

Every attractively packaged promise distracted Y'hudah from her God. Every new fad was taken up and tried in a burst of short-lived enthusiasm. For centuries it had been one lover after another. **Jeremiah** said: **Why do you go about so much, changing your ways? You will be disappointed by Egypt as you were by Assyria (2:36).** The very people Judah had been prostituting herself with, casually seeking alliances and exchanging gods, would put her to shame. He held a mirror up to them, and they saw the reflection of a fickle schoolgirl with a crush on the new boy who has just moved in down the street. She can think of nothing but seeing him, attracting his attention, getting noticed. When he jilts her, she goes after the boy in the next block and the story begins all over again. Giddy and flirtatious, the girl flits from one boy to another, careless in all her relationships, concerned only with making an impression. And the boys just use her . . . they deserve each other.

The marital metaphor with which the chapter began (see **Am - I Remember the Devotion of Your Youth**) continues throughout this file; all the images focus on infidelity. **Yirmeyahu** is dependent on an already existing tradition, especially **Hosea (Hosea Chapters 1-3, 4:10-15, 13:20-27; Isaiah 62:3-5)**, who picks up on the sexual imagery of Canaanite religion and "baptizes" it as an example of the **YHVH-Isra'el** relationship before the progressive revelation of the B'rit Chadashah (**Ephesians 5:25-33; Rev 2:4-4, 21:2**).

Yet **Jeremiah** explores the images in an even more intensive way. In terms of the human analogy, these images are true to life, reflecting the actual experience of spousal betrayal. The image used for **ADONAI** and **Y'hudah** is that of a husband who has been betrayed by his wife and all the anger and frustration that would result. In that culture, the husband would be shamed because of what the wife had done. **The Jews** were then invited to think of the feelings they might have - anger, distress, frustration, hurt - if their spouse proved unfaithful. Such language reflects the deep feelings of **God** at **Judah's** infidelity. The divine anger, disappointment, and pain are made public by **Yirmeyahu's** insights into the feelings of **the LORD**. Such insights into how **Elohim** feels about the infidelity are not to make us "feel sorry" for **Him**, but to elicit repentance from **the Israelites**.⁴⁶

The message is clear. First you had a crush on **Assyria** and that was a dead end. Now you have a crush on **Egypt** and that will turn out the same way. If you ever grow up, you will look back on those times in embarrassment and blush. Meanwhile, **ADONAI** has loved you. And you once said you loved **Him!** Your current actions develop out of your silly fantasies. They have no basis in reality. **Assyria** never cared for you; **Egypt** will never care for you. **God** cares for you. And **YHVH** will not permit **the people He** loves and **the people He** created for **His** glory to live in such adulterous and empty relationships.⁴⁷

You will also leave that place with your hands on your head (2:37a). This was their way of expressing grief, and is thought by some to signify that the heavy hand of ADONAI's affliction rested on the mourner. Should someone who is plunged into wretchedness meet a friend, they immediately **place their hands on their head** to illustrate their circumstances. Upon hearing about the death of a friend or relative, they clasp their **hands on their heads**. After being punished at school, students run home with their **hands on their heads**. They also tore their clothing and put the dust of the earth **on their heads (2 Samuel 13:19)**.

For ADONAI has rejected those you trust; they will not help you (2:37b). ADONAI speaks as a chagrined lover, a stern judge, a companion who wants a relationship with **Judah**. But **she** wants to go **her own way** (see **An - Isra'el Forsakes God**), a way that can only lead to death. Life is given only in a relationship with **the LORD**, nowhere else. The southern kingdom of **Judah**, however, chose another way.