

# Not One Is Upright

## 5: 1-9

**DIG:** What is Jeremiah searching for? How will he know when he knows one? What will the LORD do if Yirmeyahu is successful? How does that compare to God's response to Abraham's plea for Sodom (Genesis 18:26-32)? Jeremiah found a city full of evil. What evil *actions* did he find (5:2, 7-8, 19, 23, 26-27, 31)? What evil *attitudes* did he find (5:3, 5, 11-13, 21-24)? What sinful omission (5:28)? Is Jeremiah inclined to excuse the poor and blame the upper classes? Or are they equally at fault?

**REFLECT:** If Yirmeyahu walked your neighborhood, what would he find? What are the people's relationships to God like in your town or city? Would your "truth rating" save your city? Is honesty that hard to practice? Why? When is it easy to be faithful? When is it hardest? In what area of life do you need to raise the level of honesty? People in Jeremiah's day were blind to their faults and easily led to presume their innocence. What accountability mechanisms do you have in place to help detect "spiritual blind spots" in your life? How would you answer Yirmeyahu's rhetorical questions in 5:7, 9 and 29?

### During the reign of Josiah

Before the theme of the foe from the north is resumed in 5:15, there is a further discussion of the reasons for the coming judgment, a subject that has been dealt with in Chapter 2. Y'hudah's blatant rejection of the sovereignty of YHVH was the basic cause. Once she rejected the One True God in favor of other gods it was inevitable that the curses of the covenant would become operative. If the people could not see this, the weeping prophet surely could.<sup>71</sup>

This poem is structured in a standard way for a lawsuit speech. It consists of two indictments, first against the common people, and then against the leadership in Tziyon. The prophet's audience would immediately be reminded of Abraham's bargaining with YHVH over how many just men it would take to spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (see the commentary on Genesis Ew - Abraham Intercedes). At the beginning of the conversation the LORD told Abraham that He would spare Sodom if fifty just men could be found. Eventually Abraham bargained Him down to ten men, but Abraham knew when to quit . . . ten was as far as he dared go. Does the first verse here in 5:1 suggest that Yerushalayim was ten times more wicked than Sodom, if just one person who deals honestly and faithfully would save the City?

**First, Jeremiah searches for a faithful man among the common people.** Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and is faithful (*Greek: pistis*), I will forgive this City. God still indicates a willingness to pardon Tziyon. However, there is an ironic condition. He wants Jeremiah to see if there are really people in Yerushalayim who deal honestly, (conforms externally) conforms to the Torah and is faithful (conforms internally). This requirement would not bode well for the likelihood of pardon.

Although they say: As surely as the LORD lives, still they are swearing falsely. ADONAI, do not your eyes look for truth? You struck them, but they felt no pain; you crushed them, but they refused correction. They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent (*shuwb*) (5:1-3). There is no trace of obedience among the poor. They are calloused and cynical, stubborn in all their ways and will not repent. Consequently, no pardon is possible. Yerushalayim is full of evil! His search is in vain.

But then the prophet has an idea: those who refuse to repent are really only the common people, people without discernment. Yes. He will go to the educated leadership. Surely they will understand what the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob expects of them, for they have had the opportunity to study the Torah. If they set the moral tone for the rest of the population, the common people will follow. Yes. He would have better results with them!

**Secondly, he looks among the leadership of Jerusalem.** Jeremiah said: I thought, "These are only the poor; they are foolish, for they do not know the way of the LORD, the requirements of their God. So I will go to the leaders and speak to them; surely they know the way of ADONAI, the requirements of their God (5:4). But he discovered that they too had rejected the discipline of the Covenant. They, too, were engaged in self-assertion and self-sufficiency. With one accord they too had broken off the yoke and torn off the bonds of the Torah. So this search also ended in failure. Jeremiah learns the lesson God wanted to teach him. No one was faithful (*Genesis 18:26-32*). Forgiveness in the holy city of David was no more possible because of the leadership than it was because of the poor. And for this reason judgment would come.

After these indictments, the next two verses are not unexpected, though their harshness is surprising. The consequences following a breach of the covenant are symbolized as attacks by wild animals. Therefore, God declared: A lion, a metaphor for the Babylonian army, from the forest will attack them. Joined by the picture of a wolf from the desert who will ravage them, and a leopard will lie in wait near their towns to tear to pieces any who venture out, for their rebellion is great and their apostasies (from *shuwb*) keep increasing (5:5-6). The metaphor is reflective of the wild beasts that were actually a threat in the Land (1 Sam 17:34; 2 Ki 17:25-26). Animals here were used symbolically to refer to the Gentile nations, who will strike Judah as a sign of judgment (5:15).

Then the Ruach HaKodesh takes Jeremiah back to the theme He began developing back in Chapter 3 - the adultery of Jerusalem. The language of the lawsuit continues. YHVH addresses the nation: **Why should I forgive you?** Then He goes on to depict the conduct of the leadership of the City in horrendous fashion: **Your children have forsaken Me and sworn by gods that are not gods.** Perhaps this is a hint at the kind of thing that Ezeke'el saw in his vision of the sinister activities being perpetrated in the Temple compound in Tziyon (Ezekiel 8:7-12). **I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of prostitutes (5:7). The prosperity that ADONAI had granted Isra'el, instead of making her grateful, led her to depravity (Deuteronomy 32:15).**

Their spiritual adultery led to physical adultery. They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife (5:8). Again, remember that the priest from Anathoth is not merely referring to sexual misconduct here, but more profoundly to spiritual adultery and the idea of everyone frantically craving the security they hoped to find in Ba'al instead of the LORD.<sup>72</sup>

It is no wonder that Ha'Shem should ask in indignation: **Should I not punish them for this? "This" is the sin of verses 1-8. Should I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this (5:9, also see 5:29 and 9:9)?** The word nation is normally used for Gentiles. But He uses it here to show that Judah had deteriorated into a sinful, idolatrous, Gentile nation. God is always disposed to forgiveness, but forgiveness in such a City would be a mockery. It would make YHVH appear to be a docile beggar and a helpless patron. Jerusalem had lost her chance for forgiveness and stood under judgment.

Whatever function these questions may have had before the fall of Yerushalayim (see Ga - The Fall of Jerusalem), they are now questions to the readers in captivity in Babylon. The exiles are invited to think back and consider the options with which ADONAI was presented with at that time and to realize anew the questioning and agony through which God was going with respect to the shape of their future. It would be important for the exiles to see that their Redeemer had desperately tried to find another way into the future for them besides judgment.<sup>73</sup> This view of a God looking to favor His people with blessings would be grounds for hope in the future, but for now there would be a harvest of judgment that needed to be worked out, as we see next.