

The Prophets Prophecy Lies, The Priests Rule By Their Own Authority, and My People Love It This Way

5: 20-31

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 prophesy 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.