

Jeremiah's Response to a Plot Against His Life

Jeremiah's Sixth Complaint

18: 18-23

DIG: What do the people want to do with Jeremiah and why? What past deeds did Yirmeyahu remind God of? In Jeremiah's fifth complaint, how does he come to terms with what is happening to him? Can you fault Jeremiah for wanting to dish out punishment equal to what he has had to take from his accusers?

REFLECT: Why did the people of these ancient cultures kill their children? For what reasons are children killed today? Do you suppose God saved the mold when He first created you, so that He could create more people like you? Why or why not? What have you learned to appreciate about the (chip, crack or bulge) in your life's jar?

605 BC during the eleven-year reign of Jehoiakim

The opposition: The symbolic act of going to the potter's house (see *Cw - At the Potter's House*) and its interpretation did not lead to repentance on the part of the people, but to another plot against Jeremiah's life. The Levites continued to teach to itching ears (*Second Timothy 4:3*) and false prophets continued to prophesy what the people wanted to hear. They said: **Come, let's make plans against Jeremiah; for the teaching of the Torah by the priest will not cease, nor will counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophets. So come, let's attack him with our tongues and pay no attention to anything he says (18:18).**

There can be no doubt that the harsh tenor of the prophet's message evoked hostility. Here we see how pervasive and massive the opposition was. The opposition to his fearsome word was not simply an irrational, emotional response, but it was formidable and intentional that had developed a strategy for silencing that "treasonable" voice. Later the Pharisees would do the same thing to Jesus (*Mark 3:6*). As Judah formulated their own plans (*18:12*), now we see those "plans" aimed at both YHVH (*18:13*) and Jeremiah (*18:18*). The triad of priest, wise and prophet represents the established religious system of Judah. That triad is matched by the three modes of authority that ordered the community: Torah, counsel, and word. Yirmeyahu was perceived to be the enemy of all of these modes of authority. All of these authority figures unite against this "voice of disorder." Those public leaders were adamant to maintain the status quo, immune to the notion that it is the very arrangement they defended that would result in their exile or death.¹⁷⁹

There are seven passages in the book of **Jeremiah** labeled complaints or confessions: (1) **Ax - Oh, Adonai ELOHIM, Surely You Have Deceived This People**; (2) **Bj - The Plot Against Jeremiah**; (3) **Bk - Why Does the Way of the Wicked Prosper? Why Do All the Faithless Live at Ease?**; (4) **Cm - Woe to Me, Mother, That You Gave Me Birth**; (5) **Cs - Heal Me ADONAI, and I Will Be Healed, Save Me and I Will Be Saved**; (6) **Cx - Jeremiah's Response to a Threat Against His Life**; and (7) **Db - You Deceived Me, LORD, and I Have Been Deceived**. In each of these **Yirmeyahu** speaks in the first person. **He** opens **his** heart. **He** reveals what is going on inside while the fireworks are going off outside. **Jeremiah's** inner life is revealed in these confessions/complaints/prayers. When **Jeremiah** was out of the public's eye **he** was passionate with **God**. **He** confessed/complained/prayed like we all do. This was **his** secret life. This was a man of prayer.¹⁸⁰

The prayer: Then **Jeremiah** subtly complained: **Listen to me ADONAI; hear what my accusers are saying. The prophet's dilemma was agonizing. Should good be rapid with evil? Yirmeyahu had pleaded with YHVH for the good of his own people (4:19-21), yet their only response was to dig a pit to kill him. Remember that I stood before You and spoke on their behalf to turn Your wrath away from them (18:19-20).** In contrast to the time when **Jeremiah** expressed to **YHVH** his horror that the punishment of **Yisra'el** was coming, now **he** prays that it come, so **his** standing as a true **prophet** might be validated.

Jeremiah's prayer is for **God** to implement covenant curses against **his** enemies, including the standard triad of **famine, sword and childlessness**. **So give their children over to famine; hand them over to the power of the sword. Let their wives be made childless and widows; let their men be put to death, their young men slain by the sword in battle (see Ae - The Problem of Holy War in the TaNaKh).** Let a cry be heard from their houses when **You** suddenly bring invaders against them, for they have dug a pit to capture me and have hidden snares for **My** feet (18:21-22).

But **You, LORD,** know all their plots to kill me. **Do not forgive their crimes or blot out their sins from Your sight. Let them be overthrown before You; deal with them in the time of Your anger (18:23).** Finally, the issue is not the well-being of the prophet, but the validity of the judgment against **Jerusalem**. The evil "plans" made against **Jeremiah** match the evil "plans" made in resistance to **the LORD**. When **God's** "plan" is rejected, **death** will come. No amount of hostility against the messenger will change the message. **The clay** finally will have to submit to **the Potter** or be remolded into something different. **Jeremiah** made it clear that **Judah** had that option, and equally clear that **Y'hudah** had chosen infidelity.¹⁸¹