

Jeremiah

Chapter 5

Jerusalem Refused to Repent

Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her. 2 Though they say, “As the LORD lives,” yet they swear falsely. 3 O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent. 4 Then I said, “These are only the poor; they have no sense; for they do not know the way of the LORD, the justice of their God. 5 I will go to the great and will speak to them, for they know the way of the LORD, the justice of their God.” But they all alike had broken the yoke; they had burst the bonds. 6 Therefore a lion from the forest shall strike them down; a wolf from the desert shall devastate them. A leopard is watching their cities; everyone who goes out of them shall be torn in pieces, because their transgressions are many, their apostasies are great. 7 “How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken me and have sworn by those who are no gods. When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery and trooped to the houses of whores. 8 They were well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for his neighbor's wife. 9 Shall I not punish them for these things? declares the LORD; and shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this? 10 “Go up through her vine rows and destroy, but make not a full end; strip away her branches, for they are not the LORD's. 11 For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have been utterly treacherous to me, declares the LORD. 12 They have spoken falsely of the LORD and have said, ‘He will do nothing; no disaster will come upon us, nor shall we see sword or famine. 13 The prophets will become wind; the word is not in them. Thus shall it be done to them!’”

5:1–31 Jeremiah resumes his vivid description of the wickedness of the people of Judah and Jerusalem. (CSB)

5:1 The Lord challenges anyone to find just one righteous person in Israel—a rhetorical way of charging that corruption pervaded the city (see Ps 14:1–3; Isa 64:6–7; Hos 4:1–2; Mic 7:2). (CSB)

If you can find ... I may pardon. The Lord had first compared Judah with Israel. That comparison was not flattering. Now the Lord made an even more odious comparison. The Lord compared Judah with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. In the OT literature no place on earth was more wicked than Sodom and Gomorrah. With this challenge the Lord wanted to show the extent of the evil of Jerusalem. He wanted the citizenry to realize the danger of their present course. (PBC)

For the sake of only 10 righteous persons, God once was willing to spare the city of Sodom. (TLSB)

Jerusalem was so corrupt in those days that among all the leaders of the people, the counselors, the priests, the false prophets, not one just person was found, and therefore the attitude and the testimony of the faithful few, such as Baruch and Zephaniah, disappeared in the general depravity. (Kretzmann)

justice. Chem: “This entire chapter is an announcement of temporal punishments. Yet in this very announcement [God] promises that He will be favorable, that is, He will either remit or lessen the punishments, if they will turn away from their sins” (*LTh* 2:643). (TLSB)

5:2 *As surely as the LORD lives.* The oath under such circumstances had no validity, it was just as insincere as their profession of the worship of Jehovah. (Kretzmann)

they swear falsely. In violation of Lev 19:12. The Hebrew underlying this phrase is translated “commit ... perjury” in 7:9. (CSB)

They use the Lord’s name in solemn oath formulas to swear to an untruth. (TLSB)

5:3 *made their faces harder than rock.* A striking portrayal of rebellion (see Eze 3:7–9). (CSB)

God’s chosen people have become hardened and reprobate. (TLSB)

Such is the perversity of deliberate wrong-doing that it hardens the heart of the sinner against every influence for good, producing such a degree of callousness that every effort of the Lord is vain. It is in such cases that His judgment of hardening the heart of the sinner is often enacted. (PBC)

5:4 *poor.* Concerned about basic physical needs (cf. 39:10; 40:7), they are uninformed of God’s word and way. (CSB)

do not know ...the way of their God. They are more ignorant than the birds of the heavens (see 8:7). (CSB)

The prophet assumes that only the untaught poor are guilty of such depravity, and that a better state of affairs may be expected in the higher ranks of society. (Kretzmann)

5:5 *to the great.* Although possessing every advantage, they were no more righteous than the poorest of the common people. (CSB)

broken the yoke. Egyptian slavery. (TLSB)

Matters were worse here than in the so-called lower class of people; for education, wealth, and rank alone are no guarantee against wickedness. The entire class had defiantly set aside the Law of God and despised the restrictions laid down in His holy will. (Kretzmann)

5:6 *lion ... wolf ... leopard.* See Lev 26:22; Eze 14:15; cf. 2Ki 17:25–26. (CSB)

Even nature turns against them. However, also note that Israel’s neighbors preyed on them as they fled from the Babylonians. (TLSB)

watching. Lurking for his prey near by, the strongest, the most ravenous, and the swiftest of the beasts of prey being chosen as types to represent the formidable character of the Babylonian invaders. (Kretzmann)

apostasies. Their acts of rebellion against God had become a great multitude. That is the feature which ever makes sin so reprehensible: it always amounts to a rebellion against God, the Father of all mankind. (Kretzmann)

5:7 *how can I pardon you.* It would obviously be inconsistent with God’s holiness to overlook the transgressions of Israel, to let their wickedness go unpunished. (Kretzmann)

who are no gods. Idols. Or, more emphatic, "by that which is no god," worshiping a creature of their own imagination. (Kretzmann)

fed them to the full. See Dt 32:15–16; Hos 2:8. (CSB)

Moses foresaw how Israel, having waxed “fat and sleek” (v 28), would repay God’s bounty by turning to idols. (TLSB)

committed adultery. Rushing forward in companies in their eagerness to commit this beastly sin. (Kretzmann)

5:8 Religious prostitution (v. 7; see Am 2:7) leads quite naturally to literal adultery, the breaking of God’s law (see Ex 20:14, 17). (CSB)

lust stallions. Inflamed with sinful lust. (Kretzmann)

5:9 *avenge myself* – How could His anger be withheld under such circumstances? The Lord therefore turns to the Chaldeans, calling upon them to carry out His punishment upon Israel. (Kretzmann)

5:10 *Go.* Addressed to Israel’s enemies (see v. 15). (CSB)

vine rows. Vines and vineyards are often symbolic of Israel. (CSB)

not a full end. So that Judah's existence would forever be at an end. (Kretzmann)

Strip away her branches. "Hew off her branches," remove her tendrils, namely, the chief men of the nation, for they are not the Lord's, and therefore are altogether unprofitable. (Kretzmann)

5:12 *He will do nothing.* Either good or bad (see Zep 1:12). (CSB)

Thus both denying and challenging the threat of the Lord regarding the punishment which He had threatened for apostasy of every kind. (Kretzmann)

In effect, they join with the wicked and the fool who say, “There is no God” (Ps 10:4; 14:1). (TLSB)

sword or famine. Jeremiah introduces us to the first two elements of his characteristic triad: “sword, famine and plague.” (CSB)

5:13 *prophets will become wind.* Like images of false gods (see Isa 41:29). (CSB)

Words, words, words – nothing but words. That was how the people received the message of the prophet. They insisted on believing that the Lord would not do anything. They were absolutely sure that they had a lock on God. (PBC)

thus shall it be done to them. Jeeringly they suggest that if disaster is to come, it will strike only those who predict it. (TLSB)

5:1–13 From the lowliest individual in the streets to the highest official in the temple or king’s palace, all God’s people have turned away from Him to other gods. Their rebellion appears clearly in their immoral behavior as they reject every prophet who calls them back to faith and to the obedience that comes from faith. Today, as you interact with others, consider the condition of your heart in view of God’s Word.

Repent of all pride, and pray for sincere faith and wisdom with kindness. In His mercy, God preserves His people for salvation (cf v 10); He has you on His heart. • Turn us back, O Lord, when we stray. Keep us faithful in word and deed. Amen. (TLSB)

The LORD Proclaims Judgment

14 Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of hosts: “Because you have spoken this word, behold, I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall consume them. 15 Behold, I am bringing against you a nation from afar, O house of Israel, declares the LORD. It is an enduring nation; it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say. 16 Their quiver is like an open tomb; they are all mighty warriors. 17 They shall eat up your harvest and your food; they shall eat up your sons and your daughters; they shall eat up your flocks and your herds; they shall eat up your vines and your fig trees; your fortified cities in which you trust they shall beat down with the sword.” 18 “But even in those days, declares the LORD, I will not make a full end of you. 19 And when your people say, ‘Why has the LORD our God done all these things to us?’ you shall say to them, ‘As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve foreigners in a land that is not yours.’” 20 Declare this in the house of Jacob; proclaim it in Judah: 21 “Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not. 22 Do you not fear me? declares the LORD. Do you not tremble before me? I placed the sand as the boundary for the sea, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail; though they roar, they cannot pass over it. 23 But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and gone away. 24 They do not say in their hearts, ‘Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest.’ 25 Your iniquities have turned these away, and your sins have kept good from you. 26 For wicked men are found among my people; they lurk like fowlers lying in wait. They set a trap; they catch men. 27 Like a cage full of birds, their houses are full of deceit; therefore they have become great and rich; 28 they have grown fat and sleek. They know no bounds in deeds of evil; they judge not with justice the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy. 29 Shall I not punish them for these things? declares the LORD, and shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this?” 30 An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: 31 the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?

5:14 *my words in your mouth a fire.* In contrast to the total lack of God’s word in the mouths of false prophets (v. 13). (CSB)

Jeremiah being given a sharp and scathing message to the rebellious people whom the Lord here puts far from Him. (Kretzmann)

consume them. Would be consumed as a consequence of the denunciation which Jeremiah would make by God’s command. (Kretzmann)

5:15 *enduring nation.* Babylon, whose history reached back 2,000 years and more. (CSB)

whose language you do not know. The language spoken by the Chaldeans at that time was totally unlike that derived from any Semitic stem, but very much like ancient Persic. (Kretzmann)

5:16 *open tomb.* Symbolizing insatiability, destruction and death (see Ps 5:9; Pr 30:15–16). (CSB)

Their arrows bring death to their targets. (TLSB)

5:17 *eat up your sons and your daughters.* Either as sacrifices to pagan gods, or as casualties of war (see 10:25). (CSB)

fortified cities in which you trust. Destroying all of Israel's proud fortresses. (Kretzmann)

5:18 He would not yet bring total annihilation upon them. Thus the Lord is gracious and merciful and long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, ever more ready to show kindness than to bring His punishment upon the guilty. It is a most powerful appeal to all men to heed the voice of His admonitions. (Kretzmann)

5:19 *why has the Lord our God done all these things to us* – How stupid this people had become. Just as God had threatened, they felt the drought and its effects. But they imagined it was no more than bad luck. There had to be some logical explanation for it. Perhaps the prevailing wind currents were wrong, the ocean currents cold. (PBC)

5:21-31 Though the ocean and weather do not exceed the limits set by the Creator, the rebellion of His rational creatures knows no bounds. They respond to the material blessings God supplies by exploiting and neglecting the fatherless and the needy. To make matters worse, false prophets and unscrupulous priests confirm the people in their lawlessness, refusing to warn them that they cannot escape the wrath of God. The people are lulled to sleep in their sin. (TLSB)

5:21 *who have eyes ... do not hear.* Who are afflicted with spiritual blindness and dullness, who have hardened their hearts against every influence for good. (Kretzmann)

5:22 *boundary for the sea.* The immense body of the ocean with its turbulent waves, the wildest and most irresistible force of nature, is yet held in check by the power of the one true God; who, then, will not fear Him? (Kretzmann)

5:23 Though the sea never crosses its divinely appointed boundaries, God's people have violated the limits he has set for them. (CSB)

5:24 *appointed for the harvest.* Perhaps the seven weeks between Passover and the Feast of Weeks (see Lev 23:15–16). (CSB)

Gerhard says, "From these benefits they could and should have recognized God as their benefactor, just as we are led from brooks to their sources and as one who seeks a way to the sea makes a river his companion." (TLSB)

5:26 *trap.* Lit. "destroyer" (see, e.g., Ex 12:23) or "destruction" (see, e.g., Eze 21:31). (CSB)

men. Innocent (see Isa 29:21), godly, upright people (see Mic 7:2). (CSB)

5:27 *cage.* Traps woven of wicker; the Hebrew for this word is translated "basket" in Am 8:1–2. (CSB)

deceit. Riches gained through extortion and deception (see Hab 2:6). (CSB)

Their unrighteous wealth giving them a position of honor before the world. (Kretzmann)

5:28 *grown fat and sleek.* Symbolic of prosperity (see Dt 32:15). (CSB)

no bounds in deeds of evil have no limit. See Ps 73:7. (CSB)

Exceeding the ordinary measure of wickedness, as presented in the case of the Gentiles. (Kretzmann)

they do not defend . What the wicked will not do, God must do (see Dt 10:18)—and so must those who truly know and serve him (see 22:16; Jas 1:27). (CSB)

5:31 *prophesy falsely.* See 20:6 (often, and arrogantly, in God's name; see 23:25; 27:15; 29:9). (CSB)

priests rule at their direction – literally, "by their hands," that is, at their side, under the guidance of the false prophets, lording it over the people by such shady methods. (Kretzmann)

people love to have it so. They are altogether satisfied with such deception, their sound sense having left them to such an extent that they do not react against oppression and injustice. (Kretzmann)

the end – Under such circumstances the judgment is inevitable, is bound to be the fatal issue of this sinful course; and who will be able to avert it? The attitude of the men of Noah's time and of people in every crisis of the world's history is found also in our days, in spite of the earnest warning which the Lord issues in so many passages of the Bible. Cp. 1 Cor. 10, 1-13; 2 Pet. 3, 5-10. (Kretzmann)

5:14–31 The people of God have refused to give up their worship of foreign gods and their abuse of the weak and powerless. Therefore, God will deliver them into the hands of a foreign nation, rendering them weak and powerless before its armies. Today, beware of spiritual leaders who prove faithless. Consider all things in view of God's Word, and respect those who teach God's Law and Gospel. Praise God for His patience and compassion to save! By His grace, He gives us new hearts and faithful leaders. • Heavenly Father, help us to see other people as You see them in Christ Jesus, our Savior. Amen (TLSB)