

Jeremiah 5 — Whom Do You Trust?

Originally presented as part of Bob Mendelsohn's 52-part teaching series on Jeremiah in 2021. References in the video to contemporary events or gatherings reflect the time of the original recording.

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Introduction

Today's lesson is: Whom do you trust? Here's today's sermon in a single passage: "They have lied about the LORD and said, 'Not He; misfortune will not come on us, and we will not see sword or famine. The prophets are as wind, and the word is not in them. Thus, it will be done to them!'" (Jeremiah 5:12–13).

Truth. There is so much information out there, and so much misinformation designed to confuse, that people honestly want to know what's true. They want to hear truth. We may disagree politically, culturally and socially, but in Messiah those divisions do not have the final word. Messiah breaks down the dividing walls of hostility and makes of the two one new man. Jeremiah, our Weeping Prophet circa 600 BCE, speaks into a situation in which religious leaders have been promising a pain-free, trouble-free and seriously God-free life. These religionists have been finding a Bible verse and associating the benefits explained there with the activity of listening to them. Paul the apostle, some 650 years later, would write to believers in Greece: "While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labour pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape" (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

So let's painfully evaluate the 31 verses of Jeremiah 5 and see what they have to say to us. Whom do you trust? What is true? And how do we recognise the difference between trusting God and simply hearing what we want to hear?

The People Rejected the Lord — Verses 1–6

Verse 1: God says, please, go to the streets, look up and down and see if you can find anyone who has been listening to the Lord and will represent. If you can find one person, I will pardon Jerusalem. That's an amazing condition, and a comfort. It's the assurance of God's presence—not as the false prophets would say, "God is on our side, and thus we have nothing to worry about," but rather, "If we turn from our sins, God will save us." That's another matter altogether.

I so appreciate the discount God seems to be offering in verse 1. Remember in the story of Abraham and Lot, with Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham has a seminal conversation with the Almighty. The two angels are going down to Sodom to investigate the outcry against it. When God comes down to check out the situation, Abraham knows the life choices and the religion

taking place there and begins a negotiation with his Creator. “Suppose...” I love that. Mel Brooks’ creation of Don Adams as Maxwell Smart couldn’t have sounded it more clearly. What if we find you 50 righteous folks? Would that be enough to save the towns? God agrees. “Would you believe 45?” Then 40, 30, 20, and finally 10. Abraham asks, “Suppose ten are found there?” And God says, “I will not destroy it on account of the ten” (Genesis 18:32).

That’s from where the notion of the minyan, the religious quorum for the prayers of a community, comes: ten men. You would therefore think Jeremiah might similarly be able to negotiate. Maybe if I find you ten men in Judah—or say, five in Jerusalem—would that be enough to stay the execution of your wrath? God does Jeremiah one better. Mate, if you find ONE who represents me—I’m assuming besides Jeremiah himself—then that will stay my hand. And even if you find someone who uses the phrase in verse 2, “As the LORD lives,” it’s likely fake. Craigie observes that Jeremiah may encounter people who know the proper religious language and sound outwardly orthodox, but their words conceal falsehood and hypocrisy.¹

What a comprehensive and sad moment in Jewish history. Not one other man is righteous and listens to Scripture. Not one Jewish man lives out the Kingdom as described in Tanach. This may be hyperbole, but it’s clear as crystal. The Jewish people were living godlessly, and the rest of the chapter—the rest of the book—continues to unpack this reality. If that be so, then what hope do we have? If we are without any guarantee of salvation, why do we go on? Where do we look for a better tomorrow? That’s where you must get. Until you as a person, until you as a prayer team, until you as a community recognize your comprehensive lostness, you can never look up and find true hope.

In our day, we are consumed with deservedness, entitlements and self-reliance. Until you get to the place where self-reliance is found to be empty, you will never find true hope and salvation. “Unto the hills I will lift up mine eyes...” Wait. From whence does my help come? Until you ask that question, you will never get to the true answer: “My help comes from the LORD, maker of heaven and earth.” (Psalm 121.1-2) God wants to help our people. God seriously wants to help you. Listen to what prevents his helping us.

Verses 2 and 3 say that the eyes of the Lord are on truth. God has struck the people, but they have not grieved. He has consumed them, but they have refused correction. They have made their faces harder than rock. They have refused to return. The Lord is active in getting our attention, but we knock him back. He has stricken us. We didn’t grieve. In the NASB we read, “they did not weaken.” The Hebrew word is *challah*—yes, the same as our Sabbath bread. The verb can carry the sense of becoming weak, sick, wounded or afflicted, and can also be used of entreating or seeking favour. The Sabbath bread came to be called *challah* among Ashkenazi Jewish communities in Europe centuries later. Whatever the linguistic history of the bread, Jeremiah’s point here is striking: the people were struck, but they would not weaken. They hardened themselves instead of softening themselves to the plans and presence of God.

Friends, when I began in faith in 1971, I thought that this religion in which I newly found myself would require similar actions as my previous Orthodox Jewish ways and mindset. I thought I had to tough it out. A friend and I once discussed his father’s views on sin and addictions, and as a military man his father simply said, “Just stop sinning.” Almost the Nike advert: “Just do it.”

Maybe for some that works. But the longer I remain in the Lord, the more I think about weakening as my strength. Admitting I am unable is the only way to gain the strength of God to assist me. No wonder Paul said, “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Check out the same word for justice in verses 1, 4 and 5: *mishpat*. What is just? That’s what God wants you to perform. Bring his justice to your neighbourhood, to your neighbours, to your family. Micah said that. Yeshua said that. Yeshua rebuked the scribes and Pharisees because, while carefully tithing mint, dill and cumin, they neglected the weightier matters of Torah: justice, mercy and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23). Then in verse 6 come the wild animals: lion, wolf and leopard. They may symbolize enemy nations in their power and slyness, or perhaps the image is simply of wild animals themselves. Either way, destroyers are coming, and the people disregard the warning. How many ways and how many times does God have to attempt to intervene before we stop, acknowledge both him and our sins, and turn to do what he says?

The People Were Ungrateful — Verses 7–9

Verse 7: God lists adultery in both physical and spiritual thinking. What is adultery, by the way? It’s not the sexual act itself; it’s the act with the wrong person! It’s not staying within the bounds assigned by God, and it’s usually due to a lack of heartfelt compliance. God asks, “Why should I pardon you?” His people have forsaken him and sworn by those who are not gods. He fed them to the full, and their response to his provision was adultery.

That is the terrible irony. God gave, and they responded not with gratitude but with unfaithfulness. There is a connection between gratitude and trust. If I remember who has provided for me, I am more likely to trust him for tomorrow. But when I take God’s provision for granted, I begin imagining that I supplied everything myself—or that some other god, system or person did it for me. The people were full, but they had forgotten who fed them.

They Trusted the Wrong Voices — Verses 10–19

The people did believe. The issue wasn’t an absence of faith; the issue was the object of their faith. They trusted the voices of the false prophets. Verses 12–13 bring us back to the sermon in a single passage. They lied about the LORD and said misfortune would not come. No sword. No famine. The prophets were wind, they said, and the word was not in them. What a reversal! God had sent his word through Jeremiah, and the people dismissed the true prophet while trusting those who promised what they wanted to hear.

So God says in verse 14 that he will make his words in Jeremiah’s mouth fire, and the people will be wood. The word they dismissed is precisely the word that will prove true. Then comes the nation from afar: enduring, ancient, powerful and speaking a language Judah does not understand. They will devour harvests and food, sons and daughters, flocks and herds, vines and fig trees. They will demolish the fortified cities “in which you trust.” There’s our theme again. Whom do you trust? The people trusted prophets who told them everything would be fine. They trusted fortified cities. They trusted their own understanding of what God would or wouldn’t do. But they didn’t trust the God who was speaking.

And yet—there is our recurring rhythm again—verse 18 says, “Even in those days...I will not make you a complete destruction.” Brokenness and offer. Judgment will come. Their choices have consequences. But even here God says destruction will not be complete. When the people eventually ask, “Why has the LORD our God done all these things to us?” Jeremiah is to give them the answer: as you forsook God and served foreign gods in your own land, so you will serve strangers in a land that is not yours. They trusted the wrong gods. They trusted the wrong voices. And eventually they would experience where those choices led.

The People Became Complacent — Verses 20–31

Now Jeremiah addresses a foolish and senseless people who have eyes but don’t see and ears but don’t hear. God asks, “Do you not fear Me? Do you not tremble in My presence?” He points to the sea. God has placed the sand as its boundary. The waves toss and roar, but they cannot cross the boundary he has established. Creation itself recognizes limits, but God’s people will not. Instead, they have stubborn and rebellious hearts. They have turned aside and departed.

They don’t say in their hearts, “Let us now fear the LORD our God, who gives rain in its season.” Once again, they have received God’s provision without recognizing the Provider. Then Jeremiah turns to injustice. Wicked people are found among God’s people. They set traps. Their houses are full of deceit. They have become great and rich. They are fat and sleek, but they do not plead the cause of the orphan and they do not defend the rights of the poor. Remember *mishpat* from earlier in the chapter? Here is the evidence that it is missing. Religion that does not produce justice is not the life God is seeking from his people.

Then come the final two verses: “An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it?” My people love it so! Ouch. This is the sharpest and deepest criticism. The problem is not simply that the people have been deceived. They like the deception.

We have seen this language of wrong lovers already in Jeremiah. We don’t love God with our whole hearts. We do not love our neighbours as ourselves. The chief commandment is to love the Lord; all else springs from that action and enterprise. What you love will affect whom you trust. And whom you trust will affect how you live. So God asks the final question: “What will you do at the end of it?”

What Are We Learning? (Key Takeaways)

Jeremiah 5 asks a deceptively simple question: Whom do you trust? The people rejected the Lord. They received his provision without gratitude. They believed the wrong voices. Finally, they became so comfortable with the arrangement that God said, “My people love it so.” The chapter reminds us that everyone trusts something. The issue is not whether you have faith, but where you place it. Judah trusted false prophets, fortified cities, foreign powers, prosperity and its own religious language. None of them could save.

Truth sometimes hurts because it exposes the things in which we have placed false confidence. But the God who exposes our false trusts is the same God who continues to call us back. And there it is again: brokenness and offer. Even while announcing judgment, God says, “I will not make you a complete destruction.” Whom do you trust?

Conclusion and Invitation

God is calling each of us to know him and to walk with him, today and throughout our days. Have you received Yeshua as your Messiah and Lord? Have you renounced your sin, your idolatry, your forsaking God and given him first place in your life? If not, please do so now. Use your own words, if you want, but yield, surrender, to the Lord of life. Weakening can become strength when it means admitting that we cannot save ourselves and turning to the One who can. The Lord calls. He knows. He speaks truth. He forgives. He blesses and builds us up.

What’s Next? (Jeremiah 6)

Jeremiah 5 asks, Whom do you trust? Jeremiah 6 presses the question one step further: When God speaks, will you listen? The warnings become unmistakable. Blow the trumpet. Raise the signal. The enemy is approaching. Yet underneath the military imagery lies the real problem: God’s people simply refuse to hear him. Jeremiah says their ears are closed and the word of the LORD has become something in which they no longer delight.

Then God offers something wonderfully different: “Ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls.” And the people answer, “We will not walk in it.” God sends watchmen and says, “Listen to the sound of the trumpet!” They answer, “We will not listen.” They have not listened to God’s words and have rejected his Torah.

In *Jeremiah 6: Refuseniks Have a Ministry*, we’ll look at what happens when refusal becomes a way of life—and at the sobering end of that road, when the people who continually reject God find themselves described as “rejected silver.”

Endnotes

¹ Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley and Joel F. Drinkard Jr., *Jeremiah 1–25*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 26 (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), discussion of Jeremiah 5:1–2.

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