

Jer. 5
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H. Van Dyke Parunak

A. Overview

1. ch. 3-6, God's judgment on Judah.
 - a) 3:6-10, Judah fails to learn from Israel.
 - b) 3:11-4:2, God's dealings with Israel.
 - c) ch. 4-6, the judgment that Judah will receive

2. 4-6 is chiastic
 - a) 4 and 6 are descriptions of battle against Judah: *what* will happen. Characterized by alarms, cries from the people, descriptions of the enemy and of the destruction that is coming. Relatively little discussion of the people's sin. (Only in the center, 4:14-18,22.)

In 4, the common theme in every level of the chiasm is *judgment*: avoiding judgment, God as the agent of judgment, sin causing judgment.

- b) ch. 5: *Why* this judgment must fall. Cf. 5:9, 29. This section is also chiastic; the outer members deal with ideas of sin and forgiveness; the inner with sin and judgment. Thus *sin* is the dominant theme. Dominant repetitions: in outer parts, vv.9,29; inner, 10,18. Even the forgiveness is expressed negatively, so that the overall interchange is in terms of sin and judgment. Thus the three sections are:

5:7-9	5:10-19	5:20-31
No forgiveness	Sin: Reject prophets	Sin: (Development)
Sin: False gods	Judgment	No forgiveness
No forgiveness	Sin: False gods	Sin: Reject prophets

The development at the start of 5:20-31 is extensive, and leads from oppression, to distorting the law, and finally to no fear of God.

B. **5:7-9, sin will result in no forgiveness.**

The point is made chiastically, with two rhetorical questions giving the statement surrounding two explanations of the reason.

1. No forgiveness, vv.7a,9. Phrased as rhetorical questions: "How shall I pardon?" = "There's no way I can pardon." It is completely unreasonable for the nation to hope for any stay of execution.

2. The reason: their sin, 7b-8. Back to the picture of marriage:
 - a) Literal: they forsook the Lord and followed after other gods.

- b) "When I had fed them," the responsibility of the husband to provide for the wife; breadwinner. They spurned his provision by committing adultery, and not just with a single lover, but by frequenting spiritual brothels, following many gods.
 - c) "Like horses." The metaphor of human adultery is still too elevated, too noble for what they have done. So he reduces them to animals.
3. Thus the picture of sin at this point is focused on the ultimate, final problem: the people have rejected the true God and gone astray after idols.

C. 5:10-19, Judgment is coming because of their sin.

v.10 gives a summary of the section: judgment because of sin. Then the development proceeds chiastically: sin/judgment/sin.

1. Summary, v.10. The imagery here returns to the vineyard (recall 2:21). AV "walls" are terraces, used to grow crops in the hilly terrain around Jerusalem. The word read "battlements" is actually "tendrils," "branches."
 - a) The same logic applies here as in Isa. 5:5. God planted the vineyard; it did not produce as expected; therefore he will tear it down.
 - b) Reason: "They are not the Lord's." They are not producing as he intended; they have rebelled against him, so he will destroy them.
 - c) "Not make a full end." The gracious promise that God will leave a remnant.
2. 11-19: Chiastic Amplification. The outer members highlight the sin; the center returns to judgment. Two sins are highlighted: internal (rejecting the prophets) and external (following foreign gods). The second is the bottom of the ladder, which we have just seen. Rejecting the prophets is a step before that.
 - a) 11-13. First sin: The people have betrayed the Lord by rejecting his prophets. Note how he zeroes in on their sin, becoming more specific in each sentence.
 - 1) "dealt treacherously": verb refers to breach of covenant; opposite of *xesed*. How have they done this?
 - 2) "belied the Lord." That is, tell a lie concerning him. The next sentence, in turn, shows what this lie is.
 - 3) The content of their lie:
 - a> "He is not." Denies the existence of the Lord. (Thus the verb "belie" is elsewhere sometimes translated "deny the

Lord.")

- b> If he does not exist, then there is no need to fear judgment at his hand, such as the sword or famine.
- c> And in this case, the prophets who warn of these things are empty windbags: let them suffer under the sword, if they are so preoccupied with judgment.

4) **Application:** Two lessons to draw from the vocabulary here.

- a> The notion that their denial of the Lord is a lie presumes that they know it to be false. Cf. Rom. 1. All men have the knowledge of God; only the fool can say, "There is no God." Denial of God is not a conclusion drawn from evidence, but rejection of what our own heart tells us.
- b> For God's people thus to deny him is to break covenant with him. For them, it was rejecting the prophets. For us, it is rejecting the Scriptures and their message.

b) 14-18, Judgment: "Because of your sin, I will send a consumer, but not make a full end."

1) 14, Summary. They have denied the truth of the prophetic word; that word will become like fire, devouring them. The word of the prophet is presented as the actual cause of judgment. God's word is active; it accomplishes things, not just reports them.

2) 15-17, Amplification. Describes in more detail what form this judgment will take. Notice the build-up of short phrases without conjunctions--like the blows of a sword or the strokes of an ax! Jeremiah is hacking away at them with his words.

a> A nation will attack them.

b> Description of the nation, 15-16.

c> Actions of the nation, 17.

3) 18, Contrast. God's continuing promise to leave a remnant, as we saw in the summary, v.10.

4) **Application:** God's judgment is sure and certain, but also controlled. He will leave a remnant--but don't count on being in it unless you are righteous!

c) 19, second sin: they have forsaken the Lord and served foreign gods. "You served foreign gods in your own land; try serving them in their own lands, as captives there."

d) **Application:** Rejecting the Word of God (the first sin) is the

first step toward rejecting the true God himself and turning to false gods (the second sin, which was already introduced above). We must keep the Scriptures in the highest regard.

D. 5:20-31, sin will result in no forgiveness.

Again a chiasm, with sin on the outside. On the inside, not judgment, but the absence of forgiveness. This time, again, the last sin section continues what was introduced in the previous section, and the first sin section gives yet more precursors to it.

1. 20-28, First sin. Long section, developed as a three-step conversation. Here we have not a single sin, but actually three successive levels in the development.

a) 20-22, God commands the people to fear him, because of his power.

1) v.21 characterizes the people as foolish, with no heart, and then goes on to describe them as having eyes but not seeing, ears but not hearing. This description is characteristic of the idols, Ps. 115:5-8, and fulfills the warning of that passage that idolaters will become like what they worship. In fact, we become like what we worship, as well: godly, Christlike.

2) 22, They should fear the Lord, because of his power. He can make the mighty see obey his will; how can they think to rebel successfully against him?

b) 23-24 (note change in person from second to third:) Someone (perhaps Jeremiah?) replies that the people neither fear God, nor recognize him as the source of blessing. This thanklessness and failure to fear God is itself a sin, and in fact the one for which the gentiles are condemned in Rom. 1.

c) 25-26. The Lord replies that in fact they have not been receiving as much blessing as they could have, because of their oppressiveness toward one another.

1) 25, blessing has been withheld, because of sin.

2) 26-28 amplifies the nature of this sin. Note the progression. First they are described as wicked (26), then as more than wicked (28b).

a> 26-28a amplifies 26a, they are wicked. Their dealings with other men are characterized by exploitation (26), deceit (27a), and greed (27b,28a). The birds that are compared with deceit may be decoys, like wooden or tethered ducks used to attract the game; or "deceit" may be a metonymy for "goods gained by deceit."

b> 28b amplifies "they overpass the deeds of the wicked": they are worse than wicked, because they pervert judgment.

Not only do they sin, but they try to change the moral standards of their society to justify their sin!

- d) **Application:** Note the sequence of events here leading to hardening.
- 1) We oppress one another.
 - 2) Then, to justify our oppressive action, we pervert the standards of morality.
 - 3) The Lord withdraws blessing in order to call us back to himself.
 - 4) Unless we respond in repentance, we are likely to grow less thankful to the Lord.
 - 5) That in turn leads us to turn from fearing the Lord.

2. 29, No Forgiveness. Compare v.9. How can anyone expect God not to judge for such sin as this?
3. 30-31, Second Sin: the people support the perversion of prophecy (cf. 12-13). One of the greatest temptations for one who speaks for God, when the people don't like what he says, is to change the message to suit the people!

E. **Summary of the People's Sin**

Now we can work our way back through the chain of sins that leads to rejecting the true God. Along the way, watch out for ourselves!

1. 26-28a, Oppressing others. Horizontal sins; the "second table of the law." Sins against man.
2. 28b, Perverting the standards of justice in order to justify our sin.
3. 23-24, When the Lord withholds blessing, responding by not fearing him.
4. 12-13, 31, Once one stops fearing God, it is easier to reject his Word, and encouraging false teachers to pervert it to suit our tastes, in support of our self-serving standards of justice.
5. 7-8, 19, Spiritual adultery after false gods.

F. **Application**

When we think of what God has to do with our sin, we often think of forgiveness, and that is important. But it is also important to know that he can deliver us from sinning in the first place, if we are his children. Consider the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Also the teaching of 1 John that Jesus is our intercessor. 2 Pet. 2:9, he knows how to deliver out of temptation.

Closing hymn: "In the hour of trial," recognizes that our Lord not only pleads for our forgiveness, but also works to strengthen us in the hour of temptation.