

Jeremiah 5:1-31

Some have said that this chapter can be viewed as a *theodicy*.

"Theodicy is a branch of philosophy dealing with the issue of evil in light of the existence of God. If God is just and holy and good, then how do evil and misery exist? That's the question theodicy wrestles with. History's most famous statement of the "problem of evil" comes from the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus:

Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent.
Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil?
Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?"

"Of course, most people have no experience with philosophers. They do, however, watch movies, and a slightly modified version of this idea came from the character of Lex Luthor in a recent action film:

"If God is all powerful, he cannot be all good. And if he's all good, then he cannot be all powerful." –
Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice gotquestions.org/theodicy

The sin of Israel is manifestly great. The judgment of God is manifestly just.

- 1 Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it.**
- 2 And though they say, The LORD liveth; surely they swear falsely.**
- 3 O LORD, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return.**

Vs. 1 The existence of evil is rampant. There is no justice in the land and none who desires truth.

This is a general condemnation as there were godly people living in Jerusalem such as Josiah, Baruch, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah. Since the command was to go to "the streets of Jerusalem" and "the broad places thereof," the possibility is that in public places opposition to the evil would bring persecution and perhaps death so the few righteous stayed home and didn't go to the public places.

Radak (Rabbi David Kimhi -1160 - 1235 AD) comments:

"...their personal merit [the few righteous in the city] could not avail because their fear of the evildoers forced them to stay indoors, so that they were not in the *streets* or *plazas*, where they could have influenced their neighbors to improve themselves.

Abarbanel (Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel - explains that none of them had the courage to roam the streets to rebuke and correct the masses." *Jeremiah*, The Millstein Edition, page 52

Vs. 2 **they say, The LORD liveth; surely they swear falsely**

They speak as if they are believers but there is no truth to their words - they are hypocrites.

Lay people Acts 20:

- 28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.
- 29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.
- 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

perverse -διαστρεφω dee-as-tref'-o to distort, misinterpret, or (morally) corrupt

Clergy 1 Corinthians 11:

- 3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.
- 4 For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.
- 13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.
- 14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

Vs. 3 The people have been disciplined but have just rebelled further and hardened their hearts.

4 Therefore I said, Surely these are poor; they are foolish: for they know not the way of the LORD, nor the judgment of their God.

5 I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the LORD, and the judgment of their God: but these have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds.

Vs. 4 Jeremiah suggests that the poor are not able to study about God and His ways so they are foolish, but justified in their ignorance because they don't under God and His ways.

Vs. 5 Jeremiah says he will thus seek out the leaders of the nation. The leaders in the nation who knew the LORD have rejected Him and His laws.

Both the poor and the great are both guilty before God.

Ignorance is not a defense in a court of law and ignorance of the word of God is not a defense before God.

6 Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities: every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces: because their transgressions are many, and their backslidings are increased.

Three animals (lion, wolf, leopard) are used to speak of the impending judgment. These animals represent Babylon.

7 How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods: when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses.

8 They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour's wife.

9 Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?

God asks, rhetorically, how can He pardon the nation when?

1. The people rejected God and His provision and went after false gods, verse 7.
2. They were blessed by God but turned to other gods ("neighed after his neighbor's wife"), vs.8.
3. God rhetorically asks should he judge a nation such as this?, vs. 9.

10 Go ye up upon her walls, and destroy; but make not a full end: take away her battlements; for they are not the LORD'S.

11 For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against me, saith the LORD.

12 They have belied the LORD, and said, It is not he; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword nor famine:

13 And the prophets shall become wind, and the word is not in them: thus shall it be done unto them.

Destruction of the nation is promised.

1. The nation will be destroyed but not completely and they are not His, vs. 10.
2. Israel is not Gods because she has sinned grievously against God, vs. 11.
3. The nation had denied the LORD and denied that any judgment would come from God, vs. 12.
4. The [false] prophets have become empty in their words and will receive judgment, vs. 13.

14 Wherefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them.

15 Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say.

16 Their quiver is as an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men.

17 And they shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread, which thy sons and thy daughters should eat: they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds: they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees: they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustedst, with the sword.

God will use a nation (Babylon) to destroy them.

18 Nevertheless in those days, saith the LORD, I will not make a full end with you.

Once again God promises **"I will not make a full end with you."** This is the third time (Jeremiah 4:27, 5:10) God has promised not to fully destroy them.

19 And it shall come to pass, when ye shall say, Wherefore doeth the LORD our God all these things unto us? then shalt thou answer them, Like as ye have forsaken me, and served strange gods in your land, so shall ye serve strangers in a land that is not yours.

This question brings to the forefront theodicy. If you are a gracious, loving God, why would you do all these things to us? The answer is straight forward. You have forsaken me for other gods.

**20 Declare this in the house of Jacob, and publish it in Judah, saying,
21 Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not:
22 Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?**

Vs. 20 This is to be published, so all may know it.

Vs. 21 The people see and hear, but can't comprehend what is happening.

Vs. 22 The fear of the people should be in the omnipotent God of the universe, not in fallible men.

**23 But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone.
24 Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.
25 Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you.**

The people have a rebellious heart and their sins have turned them away from the God who brings blessings.

**26 For among my people are found wicked men: they lay wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men.
27 As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich.
28 They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge.
29 Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?
30 A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land;
31 The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?**

Vs. 26-27 The wicked in the nation are many and deceive many, becoming rich and famous as a result.

Vs. 28 The leaders ignore the "deeds of the wicked;" do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the rights of the people are ignored; and the leaders prosper.

Vs. 29 Once again a rhetorical question is asked by God: should not a nation of this type be judged by me? YES, they should.

Vs. 30-31 An amazing and horrible thing is committed in the nation. The leaders are unjust and the people love that it is so.

The question is asked, What will you do when destruction comes?

The chapter ends much the same way it began, vs. 7, with rhetorical questions in verse 29. No answer is needed. It is clear. God has provided blessings (vss. 7,8, 24) for the nation, but their choice to rebel by following other gods and committing sins (vss. 3,5,7,19, 23-25) has brought well deserved judgment (vss. 9, 14-17, 19).

"The Christian can respond to Epicurus and theodicy as follows [from gotquestions.com]:

Is God willing to prevent evil, but unable to? Then he is not omnipotent.

God is willing to limit evil and has acted to do just that. So, He is still omnipotent.

Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent.

God is able, but not willing, to abolish our free will. So, He is still omnibenevolent.

Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil?

God has acted to defeat evil. Evil comes simply when we fall short of His will.

Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?

God is not willing to prevent our free will. Your disapproval does not make Him any less God.

"And, to the more pop-culture-friendly Lex Luthor, Christianity can respond as follows:

'If God is all powerful, he cannot be all good. And if he's all good, then he cannot be all powerful.'

"God can be all-powerful and choose not to act according to your preferences. When you say 'all good,' what you really mean is 'doing things my way'; and when you say, 'all powerful,' what you really mean is 'capable of making us simultaneously free and robotic,' which is gibberish. An all-powerful, all-good God can allow evil in order to obtain the greater, eternal good."

Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

What about Isaiah 45:7?

"I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things."

Scripture says that God is pure and can not look on evil.

Deuteronomy 32:4 *"He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he."*

Habakkuk 1:13 *"Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil [rah], and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?"*

The Hebrew word for "evil", "*rah*", is used in many different ways in the Bible. In the KJV Bible, it occurs 663 times. 431 times it is translated as "evil." The other 232 times it is translated as "wicked", "bad", "hurt", "harm", "ill", "sorrow", "mischief", "displeased", "adversity", "affliction", "trouble", "calamity", "grievous", "misery", and "trouble." So we can see that the word does not require that it be translated as "evil." This is why different Bibles translate this verse differently. It is translated as "calamity" by the NASB and NKJV; "disaster" by the NIV; and "woe" by the RSV.

The word *rah* is used throughout the Old Testament with several meanings.

- It is used many times to mean something morally evil or hurtful (Job 35:12, 1 Samuel 30:22)
- It is also used to mean an unpleasant experience (Genesis 47:9 and Proverbs 15:10).
- It is used to describe fierce beasts (Leviticus 26:6), and even spoiled or inferior fruit (Jer. 24:3).

When God creates "evil" it is not talking about God being the agent/cause of sin and moral evil. The word "*rah*" used here means He allows or even causes natural disasters or sorrows as the result of sin.

Nationally: Israel (i.e. 2 Chronicles 36:18-25); Babylon (i.e. Isaiah 47)

Individually: Unsaved - Generally, God's judgment of unsaved waits until the final judgment (Psalm 37:1-2; Psalm 73:3, 5, 7-9, 11-12, 17, 21-22, 24, 27)

 Saved - God's discipline of His children is regular and ongoing (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 12:6-8; 1 John 5:16-17)