

The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 5:1-31

Topic

God sends Jeremiah on a run through Jerusalem then tells him what He has in store for the unrepentant Jews

Title

"A Running Commentary"

Introduction

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 protects plants and animals that are listed by the federal government as "endangered" or "threatened."

One of the first tests of the Endangered Species Act was the Tellico Dam in Tennessee. The project came to a halt when the Secretary of the Interior declared a small fish called the snail darter to be endangered. Its habitat was thought to be limited to the part of the Little Tennessee River that was to be inundated by the reservoir behind the dam.

The case reached the Supreme Court which concluded that the Endangered Species Act required it to stop construction of the dam even though \$53 million had already been spent.

Eventually Congress directed that the Tellico Dam be completed. Meanwhile populations of the snail darter had been transplanted to other nearby rivers, and evidence of other natural populations of them had been discovered as well.

There are similar stories involving the northern spotted owl, the kangaroo rat, and the delta smelt. They are endangered species whose presence halted the destruction of their habitat.

Because of their refusal to repent of their sin God was threatening to destroy the 'habitat' of His presence on earth - the Temple - and of His people - the city of Jerusalem. **Before He sent the destroyer He sent Jeremiah to conduct a survey to look for an endangered species!**

Jeremiah 5:1 "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; See now and know; And seek in her open places If you can find a man, If there is anyone who executes judgment, Who seeks the truth, And I will pardon her.

If Jeremiah could find **even one** righteous person then God would "pardon" the nation and withhold His judgment.

As we will see, Jeremiah came up empty. He could find no one righteous.

Let's step into the text ourselves. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you've been declared righteous by God. **Wherever you are, there is at least one righteous person on scene!** In your home... At your workplace... In your school... You may be the **only** "one," but since you are there, God can use you to positively affect that habitat.

The message today is that "you are the one." If 'one' seems the loneliest number to you, *it's time to remember that in Jesus Christ you are never alone.*

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Can Be The One The Lord Is Looking For, and #2 You Can See The Ones The Lord Is Looking For.

#1 You Can Be The One
The Lord Is Looking For
(v1-19)

We are in the middle of Jeremiah's second sermon to the southern kingdom of Judah. It started in in chapter three, verse six, and it goes until

verse thirty of chapter six. On the surface it's all about their sin and God's judgment, but it also reveals God's will that they would repent and not perish. You see God's will right away, in verse one.

Jeremiah 5:1 "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; See now and know; And seek in her open places If you can find a man, If there is anyone who executes judgment, Who seeks the truth, And I will pardon her.

God told Abraham He would spare Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of ten righteous people. *He told Jeremiah He'd spare Jerusalem for the sake of one righteous person!*

Apparently Jeremiah didn't count towards the 'one.' Still, this was a generous offer. For the sake of one person who "execute[d] judgment" and who sought "the truth," God would have withheld the deserved destruction.

"Executes judgment" has the idea of practical, outward obedience to the law of God. Seeking "the truth" might therefore refer to a more inward, personal devotion to the worship of God. It's a description of a believer, a person who has been declared righteous by God on the basis of their faith.

Don't overlook what, exactly, God asked Jeremiah to do. He first had to "run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem," then "in her open places," interviewing people. How long he did this we aren't told. As Jeremiah went quickly, running from one person to the next, it depicted God's will to find a righteous person and thereby avert judgment.

These Old Testament prophets were asked to do some strange things in order to be living parables and illustrations. Sooner or later, if you are a believer, God is going to ask you to do something a little unusual - certainly out of your comfort zone.

The results of Jeremiah's run are in verses two through five.

Jeremiah 5:2 Though they say, 'As the LORD lives,' Surely they swear falsely."

Jeremiah 5:3 O LORD, are not Your eyes on the truth? You have stricken them, But they have not grieved; You have consumed them, But they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; They have refused to return.

Jeremiah 5:4 Therefore I said, "Surely these are poor. They are foolish; For they do not know the way of the LORD, The judgment of their God.

Jeremiah started among the common people. They gave lip service to the Lord but Jeremiah discerned that they were lying. They were refusing to repent even though God had been lovingly disciplining them.

Jeremiah 5:5 I will go to the great men and speak to them, For they have known the way of the LORD, The judgment of their God." But these have altogether broken the yoke And burst the bonds.

Jeremiah next went to the "great men," meaning the leaders. He discovered them to be rebellious.

There was none righteous. Judgment could therefore not be averted.

Jeremiah 5:6 Therefore a lion from the forest shall slay them, A wolf of the deserts shall destroy them; A leopard will watch over their cities. Everyone who goes out from there shall be torn in pieces, Because their transgressions are many; Their backslidings have increased.

When national judgment came, it would be both swift and terrifying - like an animal attack in the wilderness with no help around.

Jeremiah 5:7 "How shall I pardon you for this? Your children have forsaken Me And sworn by those that are not gods. When I had fed them to the full, Then they committed adultery And assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses.

Jeremiah 5:8 They were like well-fed lusty stallions; Every one neighed after his neighbor's wife.

Jeremiah 5:9 Shall I not punish them for these things?" says the LORD. "And shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?

The sixth century Jews worshipped God, but falsely, going through the motions, while simultaneously participating in the worship of Molech and Baal. Since the worship of those pagan gods involved perverse sexual practices, God's people were compared to "harlots" and, even more demeaning, to "lusty stallions." They were committing adultery *and* committing spiritual adultery.

Jeremiah 5:10 "Go up on her walls and destroy, But do not make a complete end. Take away her branches, For they are not the LORD's.

God was instructing those whom He would call to destroy Jerusalem. Notice His mercy in telling them, “do not make a complete end.” God loved His people and would keep His unconditional promises to them. But He could not overlook their sin.

Jeremiah 5:11 For the house of Israel and the house of Judah Have dealt very treacherously with Me," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 5:12 They have lied about the LORD, And said, "It is not He. Neither will evil come upon us, Nor shall we see sword or famine.

Jeremiah 5:13 And the prophets become wind, For the word is not in them. Thus shall it be done to them."

When the Jews would ask if God was disciplining them, the leaders would say, “it is not He” that was doing it. They told the people the words of the prophets like Jeremiah were a bunch of “wind.” (We would say ‘hot air).

Jeremiah 5:14 Therefore thus says the LORD God of hosts: "Because you speak this word, Behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire, And this people wood, And it shall devour them.

Jeremiah 5:15 Behold, I will bring a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel," says the LORD. "It is a mighty nation, It is an ancient nation, A nation whose language you do not know, Nor can you understand what they say.

Jeremiah 5:16 Their quiver is like an open tomb; They are all mighty men.

Jeremiah 5:17 And they shall eat up your harvest and your bread, Which your sons and daughters should eat. They shall eat up your flocks and your herds; They shall eat up your vines and your fig trees; They shall destroy your fortified cities, In which you trust, with the sword.

Jeremiah 5:18 "Nevertheless in those days," says the LORD, "I will not make a complete end of you.

Jeremiah 5:19 And it will be when you say, 'Why does the LORD our God do all these things to us?' then you shall answer them, 'Just as you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve aliens in a land that is not yours.'

In the absence of a righteous man, God would bring the Babylonian armies of King Nebuchadnezzar to overrun Judah and destroy Jerusalem and its Temple.

Again God promised He would “not make a complete end” of the Jews. He kept His promise then **and He keeps it still.**

This text is not about us but, as I mentioned earlier, we can step into it. The church on earth, we Christians taken as a whole, are a restraining force against evil. In Second Thessalonians Paul the apostle said that the Spirit-filled church “restrains” until “taken out of the way.”

There’s plenty of evil to go around. It may seem the Spirit-filled church isn’t doing a good job. But when we are taken home at the resurrection and rapture of the church, then evil will be unrestrained as Satan first empowers then indwells the antichrist to nearly destroy the planet in a mere seven years.

The church is comprised, of course, of individual Christians and our point is that **you** are God’s righteous representative and you *can* affect your habitat.

Jesus once told us we were “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13). He didn’t say we could be, or that we had potential to be; He said we were “salt” and “light” by virtue of being saved.

As "salt", the Christian is to counteract the power of sin. As "light" we are to illuminate or make visible.

Ask the Lord for renewed strength to be used at home, at work, at school. Then look for, or create your own, opportunities to touch the lives of others with the love of God.

#2 You Can See The Ones
The Lord Is Looking For
(v20-31)

The rest of the chapter is an indictment upon the wickedness of the people. There was no doubting they deserved judgment. But remember that God was seeking to avert His judgment and that even in judgment He promised to not make a complete end.

The chapter closes with these words: “But what will you do in the end?” I hear a pleading in those words for them to realize how terrible their “end” will be and to therefore repent and avoid it.

We should keep the terrible “end” of unbelievers in mind - to motivate us to urge them to repent while they still take breath.

Jeremiah 5:20 "Declare this in the house of Jacob And proclaim it in Judah, saying,
Jeremiah 5:21 'Hear this now, O foolish people, Without understanding, Who have eyes and see not, And who have ears and hear not:

Jeremiah 5:22 Do you not fear Me?' says the LORD. 'Will you not tremble at My presence, Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea, By a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it? And though its waves toss to and fro, Yet they cannot prevail; Though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it.

Jeremiah 5:23 But this people has a defiant and rebellious heart; They have revolted and departed.

Jeremiah 5:24 They do not say in their heart, "Let us now fear the LORD our God, Who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season. He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest."

Jeremiah 5:25 Your iniquities have turned these things away, And your sins have withheld good from you.

God had abundantly blessed His people. All He asked in return was that they observe certain boundaries which He had set in His Law.

As a comparison, even the oceans observe God’s boundaries; we’re glad for it! But people feel God is somehow too restrictive when He sets limits. They get it into their heads that God is withholding something from them.

It all started in the Garden of Eden. One, simple boundary. Don’t eat of the fruit of one tree, the knowledge of good and evil. The devil convinced our parents God was holding back, that His ‘boundary’ was unfair, unloving.

They should have trusted the Lord. When God sets bounds, it is as a good parent who loves us with an everlasting love.

Jeremiah 5:26 'For among My people are found wicked men; They lie in wait as one who sets snares; They set a trap; They catch men.

Jeremiah 5:27 As a cage is full of birds, So their houses are full of deceit. Therefore they have become great and grown rich.

Jeremiah 5:28 They have grown fat, they are sleek; Yes, they surpass the deeds of the wicked; They do not plead the cause, The cause of the fatherless; Yet they prosper, And the right of the needy they do not defend.

Jeremiah 5:29 Shall I not punish them for these things?' says the LORD. 'Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?'

Instead of finding one righteous man, Jeremiah had found these guys. I think we'd all admit God should "punish them" and "avenge Himself" on a "nation as this."

I'll let you speculate on what that means to our great nation - to the extent we mirror some of these sins, having turned away from the Lord on a national basis.

Jeremiah 5:30 "An astonishing and horrible thing Has been committed in the land:
Jeremiah 5:31 The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power;
And My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?"

The last hope for Judah was with the prophets and the priests but they had turned false and were relying on their own strength rather than God's.

It should encourage us to stay true to the Word of God as inspired, authoritative, inerrant, and infallible.

It should remind us to rely wholly on the power of the Holy Spirit, His leading, His enabling, rather than on anything man-centered or man-made.

"But what will you do in the end?" Both believers and nonbelievers have an "end."

- If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you will end-up at what is called the Judgment Seat of Christ. It is described as a place of being rewarded by the Lord for the things you've done as a Christian from a pure motive and in His strength. In the "end" all of us will wish we had given more... prayed more... served more. **So let's do it while we still have breath!**
- If you are not a believer, and for all nonbelievers, a very different "end" is described. All nonbelievers from all time will stand before what is called (in Revelation twenty) the Great White Throne. There it will be determined that they never accepted Christ's offer from the Cross of the forgiveness of their sins. As a result, they were never declared righteous by God and their own righteousness will fall short. They will be cast alive into the Lake of Fire. **Trust the Lord while you have breath!**