

# The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations

## Lesson 4: A Corrupt People; the Coming Judgment -- Jeremiah 5:1–6:30

God gives Jeremiah one of the strangest assignments in Scripture. “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” (5:1). It is an echo of Abraham bargaining for Sodom, God’s mercy hunting for a reason to spare the city. The whole population could be pardoned for the sake of one truly righteous person. So Jeremiah searches. He walks the streets and the squares, and the chapter holds its breath. And the search comes up empty. The rot is not in a few bad apples; it has reached the whole barrel.

What makes the corruption so chilling is how comfortable everyone is inside it. The prophets prophesy falsely, the priests rule by the prophets’ direction, “and my people love to have it so” (5:31). Read that last line slowly. The people are not victims of their leaders; they are accomplices. They prefer the smooth lies to the hard truth. There is a market for false comfort, and the false prophets are simply meeting the demand. It is one of the most modern verses in the Bible: people love to be told that everything is fine when it is not.

Into this fog God speaks the verse that gives the whole study its center of gravity. “Thus says the LORD: Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk in it” (6:16). Picture a traveler at a crossroads, lost, and an old map points back to a tried and proven road that leads home and to rest. God is not inventing a new burden; He is calling His people back to the well-worn path of covenant faithfulness their fathers once walked. And the people fold their arms and say four of the saddest words in Scripture: “We will not walk.”

By the end of chapter 6, God reaches for the image of a refiner who has given up. “The bellows blow fiercely; the lead is consumed by the fire... Refining is in vain, for the wicked are not removed. Rejected silver they are called, for the LORD has rejected them” (6:29–30). The fire that should have purified them found nothing pure to draw out. Yet even here the warning is mercy. God does not destroy in silence; He pleads, He searches, He points to the ancient paths, He blows the bellows of discipline, all so that His people might still turn. As we walk through these two chapters, the question is not really about ancient Jerusalem. It is about us. When God shows us the ancient paths, do we walk in them, or do we, too, prefer to be told that everything is fine?

**Group Discussion:** God describes a people whose prophets prophesy falsely and whose priests rule by their direction, and adds the devastating line, “my people love to have it so” (5:31). Why are people so often drawn to comfortable falsehood over hard truth, and where do we see that same appetite for reassuring lies in our own day and in our own hearts?

**Personal Reflection:** God pleads, “Stand by the roads... ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls,” yet the people answered, “We will not walk in it” (6:16). Where is God showing you an “ancient path,” a tried and proven way of obedience, that you have been reluctant to walk, and what is holding you back?

*Read Jeremiah 5:1–6:30*

## **Study Questions**

1. Read 5:1–6. God sends Jeremiah to search the city for even one person who “does justice and seeks truth,” promising to pardon the whole city for that one’s sake (5:1). What does this search reveal about both the pervasiveness of sin and the heart of God who looks for any reason to show mercy?
2. Jeremiah could not find one truly just person in the whole city (5:1). When you honestly search your own life, where do you find that sin has spread further and quieter than you wanted to admit?
3. Read 5:7–19. God asks, “How can I pardon you?” and describes a people who “have spoken falsely of the LORD” and said, “He will do nothing” (5:12). What does this false security, the belief that God will never actually act against sin, reveal about the human heart, and why is it so dangerous?
4. Many today live as if God will never call them to account for sin (5:12). Where have you quietly told yourself that a particular sin “won’t really matter” or that God “won’t mind,” and how does that false security weaken your walk with Him?

5. Read 5:20–31. The chapter ends with the false prophets prophesying lies, the priests ruling by their direction, “and my people love to have it so” (5:31). What does it reveal about a people when they prefer leaders who tell them comfortable falsehoods over those who tell them the truth?
  
6. It is easy to blame corrupt leaders, but God blames the people who “love to have it so.” Where are you tempted to seek out voices, teachers, or media that simply confirm what you already want to believe rather than tell you the truth?
  
7. Read 6:13–21. God pleads, “Ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it,” but the people answer, “We will not walk in it” (6:16). What are these “ancient paths,” and what does it mean that the way to “rest for your souls” is found in returning to God’s tried and proven way rather than in something new?
  
8. God offered rest for the soul to those who would walk the ancient paths, yet the people refused (6:16). What “rest” are you currently seeking in new things or your own way, and how might it actually be found in the well-worn path of trusting, obedient faith?
  
9. Read 6:22–30. As the disaster from the north advances, God calls His people “rejected silver,” because the refining fire of His discipline found no purity to draw out: “Refining is in vain, for the wicked are not removed” (6:29–30). How does this picture of the refiner display

God's holiness, the purpose of His discipline, and His patient mercy, and how does it point us to the salvation and purifying we can only find in Christ?

10. Look back across these two chapters, from the empty search for one just person to the refused ancient paths to the rejected silver. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is calling you off the comfortable road of false security and onto the ancient path, and how He is using these verses to form His likeness in you this week.

### **Digging Deeper**

**Reflect on these passages:** Genesis 18:23–32, Abraham's plea for Sodom and God's willingness to spare the city for the sake of the righteous; Isaiah 30:9–11, a people who tell the prophets, "Speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions"; 2 Timothy 4:3–4, the warning of a time when people gather teachers "to suit their own passions" and turn from truth to myths; Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus' invitation, "Come to me... and I will give you rest," the true rest the ancient paths pointed toward; Malachi 3:2–3, the Lord as a refiner's fire who purifies His people like silver and gold.

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