

WHY SHOULD GOD FORGIVE WHEN PEOPLE ABANDON HIM?

We presume on God's mercy and think that His patience is such that He will not bring judgment or punishment on us. Israel and Judah thought that since they were God's chosen people there would never be any accountability as prescribed in the writings of Moses or that predicted by the prophets. We have heard so often that Jesus seeks the "lamb that has gone astray" and how God reaches down to save mankind, that we forget such words as "seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near." We forget that He told us "My Spirit would not always strive with mankind."

Jer 5:1-2 "Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city. Although they say, 'As surely as the LORD lives,' still they are swearing falsely."

God is merciful and willing to forgive. However, when a situation gets to the point that not even one person has integrity and walks in truth, then He has no choice but to act in judgement. People may talk about loving and trusting God but with many it is a sham. They have heard all the right words and can parrot them back. They go through the motions of playing church but many have never been born of the Spirit; consequently, they are lost and apart from God with no hope of salvation.

Jer 5:3-5 3 O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You struck them, but they felt no pain; you crushed them, but they refused correction. They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent. I thought, "These are only the poor; they are foolish, for they do not know the way of the LORD, the requirements of their God. So I will go to the leaders and speak to them; surely they know the way of the LORD, the requirements of their God." But with one accord they too had broken off the yoke and torn off the bonds.

Some are so dead in their sins and so hardened in their hearts that when warnings and redemptive judgements come from God there is no response or perhaps even a further turning away from God. We sometimes make excuses for these as just being unlearned people who could not be expected to know any better. However, it is evident that those who should know better do no better than those who know no better.

Jer 5:6 Therefore a lion from the forest will attack them, a wolf from the desert will ravage them, a leopard will lie in wait near their towns to tear to pieces any who venture out, for their rebellion is great and their backslidings many.

Because of continuing iniquity and refusal to repent, the cup of iniquity becomes full and judgement comes in the form of wild beasts. We don't see much of the beast of the forest but we have beasts in human bodies that act far worse than four legged animals.

Jer 5:7-9 "Why should I forgive you? Your children have forsaken me and sworn by gods that are not gods. I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of prostitutes. They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife. Should I not punish them for this?" declares the LORD. "Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?"

How can we answer the question posed by God "Why should I forgive you?" Many have failed to secure our most precious earthly possession (our children) for the Kingdom of Heaven. We have a generation where few know and follow God. They follow many other priorities and devote themselves to pleasure seeking, but not to God.

As a nation we have been blessed beyond measure with material blessing and yet we take it all for granted and do not acknowledge God as the source of this blessing. Instead, the more we are blessed the farther we run from God.

We have become a nation obsessed with sex which leads to fornication and adultery. Among many of our young people, sex has become a participation sport. It is nothing more than

a casual game of conquest. Perversions of all kinds have broken out and polluted the land and the people. And God asks "Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?"

Jer 5:10 "Go through her vineyards and ravage them, but do not destroy them completely. Strip off her branches, for these people do not belong to the LORD.

The word translated wall (in some versions) can mean a "vine-row" which would be in agreement with the use of the word branches in the second sentence of this verse. The KJV uses the word battlement rather than branch; however, the literal meaning of the Hebrew word is branch or tendril of a vine. The judgement of God on Judah was not total destruction but nearly so. There did come a time (almost 600 years later) in which not one stone would be left upon another, a time when their "house was left to them desolate."

What a sad situation to hear such words as "these people do not belong to the Lord." The net effect is like the words of Jesus when He said of those who did not do His will, "I never knew you." Often we will hear people ask, "do you know the Lord?" A more important question might well be, "Does the Lord know you?"

Jer 5:11-13 "The house of Israel and the house of Judah have been utterly unfaithful to me," declares the LORD. They have lied about the LORD; they said, "He will do nothing! No harm will come to us; we will never see sword or famine. The prophets are but wind and the word is not in them; so let what they say be done to them."

The extent of Judah's unfaithfulness was described as "utterly." Apart from the true church, our nation seems to be getting closer to a condition of utter immorality. We wonder, "How could it get any worse?" I'm concerned that we've not seen anything yet.

Many false prophets (some of these are proclaiming from pulpits) lie about the Lord. In their "feel-good" philosophy and "hot-tub" religion they are given many a false sense of security by presenting only part of the picture of God. They have totally ignored that the God of Love is also the God of Judgement and eventually the God of Wrath.

Jer 5:14-17 "Therefore this is what the LORD God Almighty says: "Because the people have spoken these words, I will make my words in your mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes. O house of Israel," declares the LORD, "I am bringing a distant nation against you— an ancient and enduring nation, a people whose language you do not know, whose speech you do not understand. Their quivers are like an open grave; all of them are mighty warriors. They will devour your harvests and food, devour your sons and daughters; they will devour your flocks and herds, devour your vines and fig trees. With the sword they will destroy the fortified cities in which you trust.

God is preparing and will raise up proclaimers of the truth and these will declare the word of God regarding the judgements coming upon the world. This time the judgements will not be from a distant nation but from God. All the things in which we now trust will be destroyed and we will find that nothing is of any value apart from God.

Jer 5:18-19 "Yet even in those days," declares the LORD, "I will not destroy you completely. And when the people ask, 'Why has the LORD our God done all this to us?' you will tell them, 'As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your own land, so now you will serve foreigners in a land not your own.'

God's judgements on His people are redemptive to bring them back to Himself and away from trusting in anything else. We see also the principle that we will wind up serving the nation whose gods we worship.

Jer 5:20-22 "Announce this to the house of Jacob and proclaim it in Judah: Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear: Should you not fear me?" declares the LORD. "Should you not tremble in my presence? I made the sand a boundary for the sea, an everlasting barrier it cannot cross. The waves may roll, but they cannot prevail; they may roar, but they cannot cross it.

God reminds us in the creation of His mighty power and our dependency on Him. If we

will not serve Him from a motive of Love, then certainly we should serve Him out of fear.

Jer 5:23-25 But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away. They do not say to themselves, 'Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives autumn and spring rains in season, who assures us of the regular weeks of harvest.' Your wrongdoings have kept these away; your sins have deprived you of good.

The rebelliousness of the human heart is such that it chooses destruction rather than submission. It is ironic that we pray for blessing apart from obedience and are disappointed. We fail to realize that the fruit of obedience is blessing.

Jer 5:26-29 "Among my people are wicked men who lie in wait like men who snare birds and like those who set traps to catch men. Like cages full of birds, their houses are full of deceit; they have become rich and powerful and have grown fat and sleek. Their evil deeds have no limit; they do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it, they do not defend the rights of the poor. Should I not punish them for this?" declares the LORD. "Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?"

The consequences of people's rebellion is that they end up with leader who are much as themselves in their basic integrity. Such "evil leaders" in effect punish the people because they neglect the "poor and needy" and think only of themselves. God's judgement cannot help but come on such people.

Jer 5:30-31 "A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way. But what will you do in the end?"

The condition of the times of Jeremiah is much as it is today -- horrible and shocking. The religious leaders do not know nor proclaim the truth but serve up a watered down substitute. That's what many are looking for in some churches. They don't want to hear the fact that the cup of iniquity is being filled up and that judgement is on its way. Few, if any, are addressing the question "What will you do in the end?"