

LEADERS AND TIMES OF CRISIS: JEREMIAH 5:1–6 A CASE IN POINT

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ABSTRACT

The book of Jeremiah reflects a particular period in the history of Judah, certain theological perspectives and a particular portrayal of the prophet Jeremiah. Covenant theology played a major role in Jeremiah's view of life and determined his expectations of leaders and ordinary people. He placed high value on justice and trustworthiness, and people who did not adhere to this would in his view bear the consequences of disobedience to Yahweh's moral demands and unfaithfulness. The prophet expected those in positions of leadership to adhere to certain ethical obligations as is clear from most of the nouns which appear in Jeremiah 5:1–6. This article argues that crisis situations in history affect leaders' communication, attitudes and responses. Leaders' worldviews and ideologies play a definitive role in their responses to crises. Jeremiah's religious views are reflected in his criticism and demands of people in his society. This is also true as seen from the way the people and leaders in Judah responded to the prophet's proclamation. Jeremiah 5:1–6 emphasises that knowledge and accountability are expected of leaders at all times, but in particular during unstable political times.

INTRODUCTION

What is understood by the notion "times of crisis" can vary from one situation to another. It can refer to personal circumstances that individuals experience that cause anxiety or discomfort. It can also refer to situations that affect the lives and existence of a group or even the nation. In this article the focus is on a time in the history of the people of Judah, reflected by the text of Jeremiah that severely influenced the political existence of Judah as a nation and changed the course of their future. International events not only affected the history of Judah as a nation, but also exerted influence on the local political scene, and even more than that changed the lives of each and every

Judean. The book of Jeremiah is set against the backdrop of a time in history when the Babylonians dominated the international scene. Judah was threatened on numerous occasions by the advancing Babylonian army and even experienced several invasions and deportations (cf. Diamond 2003:555). It is this time in the history of the state and people of Judah that is referred to here as “times of crisis” (cf. Römer 2012:159–160). The argument presented in this article is that Jeremiah 5:1–6 should be viewed and understood against this critical period in the life and times of the people of Judah. An attempt will be made to show that the threat of an invading enemy caused the time of crisis and affected the prophet, the leaders and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.¹ An argument will also be presented that Jeremiah acted as a religious leader² during this period in the history of Judah with a particular mind-set and a view on reality that determined his interaction and expectations of other leaders and people in society.³ Because of his strong convictions and particular views on political and religious matters, he expected certain characteristics and behaviour from other people. At times this resulted in clashes of views with kings, prophets and priests and of course ordinary people in the society.

The aim is to present a sketch of Jeremiah as he is presented by the tradition in the book of Jeremiah and argue from this presentation how he responded to this critical period in the history of Judah as a nation and interacted with people and leaders during this time.⁴ Jeremiah’s interaction with society and leaders will for the purpose of this

¹ The finalisation of the book of Jeremiah as a literary document occurred at a later time than the period when Jeremiah acted as prophet (cf. Edelman and Ben Zvi 2009). Scholars have pointed to possible contemporary issues which the compilers of the book wanted to address, but I will not entertain them in this article. I am interested in what Jeremiah 5:1–6 presents against the backdrop of a critical time of the history of Judah as a response to a “real life” situation that concerns the prophet Jeremiah and the people of Judah.

² Many definitions exist as to what a leader is. It is not the place here to entertain all the various definitions and theories. In this article I use the term for people who influence others, who care for people and take action to exercise that care, who are in a position to take decisions that affect other people’s lives, who have a sense of social justice and act on this sense and who help determine the future of others. What is mentioned here is more a description of what leadership entails than a definition of leadership.

³ Cf. Droogers (2014:21–35) for a discussion on worldview, religion and ideology.

⁴ According to the book of Jeremiah the prophet Jeremiah acted in turbulent times in the history of Judah (cf. Perdue 2015:87–88; Craigie et al. 1991:xliv–xlvii). I am fully aware of the strongly argued views today that it is impossible to reconstruct the prophet as historical

article be limited to Jeremiah 5:1–6. A brief overview of the mentioned critical period in the history of Judah will also be given. This will be followed by a discussion of the literary context, structure and content of Jeremiah 5:1–6 and a reflection on some of the main observations that will arise from the analysis of the chosen passage. Some conclusions in terms of leaders during times of crisis will be drawn.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The period in Judah's history when Jeremiah acted as prophet can be labelled a time of crisis due to international political circumstances which affected the internal politics and religious life in Judah. On the international scene Assyria, Egypt and eventually Babylonia dominated the scene. In Judah some people had pro-Egyptian sentiments, whilst others were more pro-Babylonian inclined. All of this played a critical role in the society of Judah and in particular the inhabitants of Jerusalem. A brief overview will suffice to illustrate the crisis during this period in Judah's history. The people had to deal with the death of king Josiah in 609 B.C.E. at the hands of Farao Necho II of Egypt, the deportation of king Jehoahaz (Shallum) to Egypt after only three months on the throne and the abuse of power by king Jehoiakim (609–598 B.C.E.). There were further accusations of idolatry, moral depravity and the besieging of Jerusalem by the Babylonian forces during Jehoiakim's reign. This is followed by the deportation of king Jehoiachin in 597 B.C.E. and finally the invasion and destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and the deportation of king Zedekiah in 586/7 B.C.E. to Babylon (cf. Scheffler 2002:130–132; Fretheim 2002:3 and Stulman 2005:2–4). This concise overview clearly depicts turbulent times for the people of Judah.

figure and that the focus should be on the book rather than the person of the prophet (cf. Barstad 2009:15–20). This article will not entertain the "fact-fiction" debate, but the following viewpoint stated by Barstad (2009:24) seems relevant: "Through the ancient stories, we get access to historical reality in ancient Israel. The Book of Jeremiah, for instance, may, in its present form, be classified as a prophetic novel. When we read this story, we learn a lot about what prophecy was like in ancient Israel." The truth of the matter is that what is described in the book of Jeremiah is not only a literary reality, but corresponds with many other descriptions of the phenomenon of prophecy both in the ancient Near East and in the Israelite tradition (cf. Nissinen 2009:119–120).

JEREMIAH THE PERSON⁵

What do we know of the person Jeremiah as he is presented in the book of Jeremiah? In the book of Jeremiah we find the literary presentation of material collected under the name of the prophet Jeremiah. It serves no purpose at this stage to argue for or against the possibility of Jeremiah as a historical person; the fact is that he is presented as a real person in the book with reference to his family relations, place of birth and relationships with several named people and institutions. The book describes him as being of priestly descent and most probably a priest himself (cf. Jer 1:1), born in Anathoth, the Levites' priestly city. Jeremiah was from the Mushite Levites and his call narrative reveals rituals associated with the Levitical cult (Leuchter 2011:96–97). Jeremiah's way of thinking and content of his messages were most probably influenced by the fact that Anathoth was located on the border of the northern kingdom and that the city had a Levite priestly history (Blenkinsopp 1995:66–114; see also Tiemeyer 2009:233–264). It offers a possible explanation for the presence of northern traditions in Jeremiah's proclamation (Albertz 1982:43–44).

The discovery of the book of the law in 621 B.C.E. resulted in Jeremiah forming relationships with both the temple and the royal household.⁶ A very significant person, who played a crucial role in the life of Jeremiah, was Shaphan. He was the secretary in King Josiah's administration and the temple was also under his jurisdiction. Shaphan received the book of the law from Hilkiah who read it to the king (2 Kgs 22:3–10). He was also a key figure in King Josiah's reform initiative, and he and his sons were very loyal followers of Josiah (Lohfink 1978:336). It was most probably Shaphan who introduced Jeremiah to the book of the law, which strongly influenced Jeremiah's views and convictions. The family of Shaphan affected Jeremiah's existence in a very significant way (Reimer 2009:133–135). Jeremiah enjoyed support from the Shaphan family who were strong supporters of Josiah's reforms. It was due to his relationship

⁵ Reference is to Jeremiah the literary character as he is portrayed in the book of Jeremiah. See the discussions offered by Mills (2007:110–134), Dempsey (2007:xv–xxxii) and Diamond (2008:233–237).

⁶ Tiemeyer (2009:234) argues that in the persona of Jeremiah the offices of priest and prophet are combined. Jeremiah was familiar with the temple surroundings and as a prophet the king and the royal household were always his concern.

with this family that Jeremiah was familiar with the king's court and had good knowledge of what Josiah's reform program entailed. As said, that would also explain the Deuteronomistic-ethical principles present in Jeremiah's proclamation (cf. Leuchter 2011:97–98; Brueggemann 2006:21–22).

The assumption can be made that Jeremiah's worldview was informed or shaped by covenant theology in the tradition of Moses (Lundbom 2010:35–37). Jeremiah's theology therefore reveals influence of northern kingdom traditions. The prophet reveals a strong understanding of what ethical behaviour entails. His choice of words however also reveals that he was influenced by practical wisdom based on observations and experiences from every day relationships (cf. Allen 2008:73). He emphasises the need for fairness and truthfulness (faithfulness) in these relationships in order to establish and maintain an orderly society. (cf. Jer 22:15–17). Jeremiah is presented as a strong proponent of the fact that Yahweh alone should be worshiped and he vehemently opposed any form of syncretistic worship (Smith 1971:24, 45). He regards the worship of other gods as a violation of the covenant relationship and disloyalty to Yahweh that should not go unpunished.

The book of Jeremiah also reports on various conflicts between Jeremiah and some priests (cf. Jer 19:14–20:1–6 Pashhur episode), prophets (cf. Hananiah in Jer 28) and kings (cf. Jer 21:1–23:8). One of the main reasons for the conflict was the divergent interpretations of the royal-Zion theology. Jeremiah was not anti-Zion, but could not support the unconditional presence of Yahweh in the temple combined with the unconditional continuance of Davidic kingship which resulted in a sense of false security.

It is argued in this article that the prophet's relationship and connectedness to Yahweh informed his convictions and provided the basis for his values, ethics and principles. Jeremiah viewed the crisis of his time from his worldview that was based on his covenant relationship with Yahweh and therefore his religious perspective and convictions also determined his expectations and demands of people.

LITERARY CONTEXT OF JEREMIAH 5:1–6

Jeremiah 2:1–6:30 forms a unit containing a preface to a cycle of poems (2:1–3), a collection of material on false cults (2:4–4:4), a cycle of poems on “the foe from the north” and other motifs (4:5–6:26; cf. Carroll 1986:86). The section that is of interest for the purposes of this article, Jeremiah 5:1–6, therefore forms part of the cycle of poems on the foe from the north.

The material in Jeremiah 2:1–6:30 was most probably collated at a stage in history when the outcome of things was known, and there was a need to explain why history had taken that particular course. In collating the collection as we have it, the collectors and editors of the Jeremiah material may have had a threefold intention: to explain the course of history; to justify why developments had taken that particular turn; and finally to re-emphasise the importance of the covenant and its obligations on the society to which the collectors or interpreters of the history of the Israelites belonged.

Scholars in general agree that the cycle of poems in Jeremiah 4:5–6:26 anticipates the imminent judgement of Judah by Yahweh (Carroll 1986:160; McKane 1986:90). To achieve this, He will use an enemy from the north, a reference to the Babylonians. O’Connor (2010:41) calls this collection of poems “War poems”. Some of the poetic sections in this collection mention the reasons for this impending disaster, and also reveal the envisioned outcome of events. Brueggemann (1998:53) summarised the content of this section as follows:

- Anticipation of an invading army dispatched by Yahweh
- Prophetic ruminations on personal grief and judgement
- Harsh visions of the end of the human historical process
- Statements of guilt and punishment, which follow standard prophetic motifs.

This cycle of poems is a prophetic polemic (cf. Carroll 1986:189) stating the reasons for Yahweh’s disappointment. The poetic sections appear to be interspersed with verses in prose style for the purposes of either remarking on a particular aspect or introducing a new thought or idea (cf. 5:7–9).

ANALYSIS OF JEREMIAH 5:1–6

Jeremiah 5:1–6 forms part of the bigger unit 5:1–9. At first reasons will be provided why 5:1–9 should be regarded as a distinct text unit in the context of Chapter 5, but also in relation to the preceding chapter. Arguments will also be presented for focussing on the subsection 5:1–6.

Many scholars regard Jeremiah 5:1–9 as a separate pericope. Besides the fact that the Masoretic Text (MT) has a *petuga* at the end of 4:31, there is clearly a change in syntax and content from 5:1 onwards. From a section expressing anguish over Jerusalem and a first person speaker, 5:1 is introduced by an imperative (“run to and fro”), followed by two more imperatives (“look around” and “take note”). The scenery depicted is also that of the streets and squares in the city of Jerusalem. At the end of 5:9 the MT has a *setuma* as indication that the unit ends at verse 9.⁷ Whereas verse 9 ends with a first person singular as speaker, verse 10 again commences with a number of imperatives, indicating a new unit. However, despite the fact that 5:1–9 is the larger unit, 5:1–6 can be treated as a separate unit because there is a change to a first person singular subject in 5:7, most probably Yahweh (Holladay 1986:174). Jeremiah 5:7–9 is closely related to 5:1–6 with regard to content, because it offers an explanation of the complaint in 5:1–6 (Carroll 1986:178–179), but is probably a later addition. For the leader dialogue envisaged in this article, 5:1–6 will be the focus.

In addition to the syntactical reasons why 5:1–6 are treated as a logical unit, scholars address the issue of who the speakers in the various verses are. This to an extent justifies the demarcation of Jeremiah 5:1–6 as a separate section for discussion. Rudolph (1968:37) regards 5:1–6 as a dialogue between Yahweh and the prophet with Yahweh speaking in verse 1,⁸ the prophet in 2–5 and verse 6 as Yahweh’s reply (cf. also McKane 1986:114; Oosterhoff 1990:188). Bright (1965:41) offers a slightly

⁷ Scholars as usual differ on the demarcation of the text under discussion. Some regard 5:1–9 as a literary unit (Bright 1965:36; Thompson 1980:234–235; Lundbom 1999:371–385; Fischer 2005:236–243; and Allen 2008:72–74), whilst other argue for 5:1–6 to be treated as a separate unit (Rudolph 1968:37; Weiser 1969:44–46; Carroll 1986:173–174; Oosterhoff 1990:188; Brueggemann 1998:62–63). Still others suggest that 5:1–11 should be linked together (Jones 1992:119–123) or 5:1–13.

⁸ Verse 2 in the MT is introduced by אָמַר , but it is lacking in the LXX. Instead the LXX adds the words “says the Lord” to make explicit who the speaker is.

different viewpoint by assigning verses 1–2 to Yahweh, 3–5 to Jeremiah and regards verse 6 either as Jeremiah’s conclusion or as Yahweh’s judgement announcement. Thompson (1980:234–235) agrees in general with Bright, but ascribes verse 6 also to Jeremiah (so also Huey 1993:87–88; Lundbom 1999:373; and Allen 2008:72–74). Lundbom (1999:373) goes to the extreme when he defines who is speaking in the various verses. According to him Yahweh speaks to a search party in 5:1–2, Jeremiah to Yahweh in 5:3, Jeremiah to himself in verses 4–5b, Jeremiah to Yahweh in 5c–6 and Yahweh to the people in 5:7–8. It is not necessary to go to extremes to decide who is speaking in the various verses, because it is not strange for the voices of Yahweh and the prophet to be entwined. The prophet in any case is the mouthpiece of Yahweh. In verse 1 people are sent to make some observations in Jerusalem followed by a statement in verse 2 that people swear falsely. The prophet speaks in 5:3–5 and in verse 6 a conclusion is drawn from what has transpired.

Text analysis and exposition

Jeremiah 5:1 commences with an instruction from Yahweh. The location for the setting of the plot is significant. The scene to unfold concerns Jerusalem and its public spaces. Four verbs in imperative plural form are employed to instruct an unidentified group to run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, to look around, to observe and to search in the squares of the city for a single person with specific qualities. They should look really hard to find a single person who acts justly (מִשְׁפָּט) and seeks trustworthiness (אֱמוּנָה). These two nouns are used in Deuteronomy 32:4 to describe God as one who acts justly and is faithful. The Hebrew nouns מִשְׁפָּט and אֱמוּנָה are used in conjunction in 5:1 with the verbs “to do” and “to seek.” It is important that the person strives and yearns (seeks) to be faithful and trustworthy (Holladay 1986:176; Allen 2008:72). Reumann (2000:453) says, “The noun אֱמוּנָה suggests conduct that grows out of a relationship, faithfulness, especially in inner attitude and conduct on the part of an individual ... or God.” The concept most probably has to be understood within the context of faithfulness to Yahweh, the covenant God. What is meant by אֱמוּנָה is aptly formulated by McKane (1986:1160) namely that Yahweh “expects a

constancy of regard and commitment which matches the constancy of his loving purposes for his people”. The concept of doing justice (משפט) is significant in the whole book of Jeremiah (cf. Jer 5:1; 7:5; 9:23 (for Yahweh); 22:3; 22:15; 23:5 and 33:15). This concept is often used in Jeremiah to express what Yahweh’s expectations of leaders are, in particular the kings and their administration. Leaders were first and foremost expected to act ethically sound. This implied that their actions should be fair and just towards everybody, in particular the widows, orphans and the poor. They were also obligated to safeguard justice and fairness in their societies. Verse 1 ends with a first person singular form of the verb with Yahweh as subject. If a person with the qualities mentioned above can be found, then Yahweh would forgive the city. This reminds one of Genesis 18:22–33 where Abraham is in dialogue with Yahweh in an effort to save Sodom from the wrath of Yahweh and destruction if some righteous people can be found. If this is intentional, then the tone is set that destruction is looming for Jerusalem. Holladay (1986:176) is probably correct in understanding that covenantal obedience is at stake here. As the discussion progresses this initial assumption needs to be further substantiated.

In 5:2 the third person plural verb indicates that the people take an oath by using Yahweh’s name, but they are in actual fact swearing falsely.⁹ Craigie et al. (1991:87) make the interesting observation that some people create the impression that they are Yahweh followers by taking oaths in Yahweh’s name, but it is hypocritical and deceitful. An important keyword to take note of is the noun “falsehood, deception” (שקר), which stands in direct contrast to “trustworthiness” referred to in verse 1. The noun שקר is very significant in the book of Jeremiah and is used in many instances by Jeremiah in blaming other prophets in his society for prophesying falsely (cf. Overholt 1970:86–104; Rochester 2013:161–162). The noun “deception” in verse 2 should be understood in contrast to what is required in verse 1, namely someone “trustworthy”.

In the next verse (5:3) presumably the prophet Jeremiah is asking a rhetorical question about what Yahweh expects of people. The keyword in 5:3 is again the noun “trustworthy/faithful” (אמונה) found in verse 1. Yahweh expects the covenant people

⁹ Many manuscripts read אכן (surely) instead of לכן (therefore).

to be trustworthy and faithful, but it was in actual fact non-existent, resulting in Yahweh striking them. The sentence is structured in two parallel thought trains, indicating that the envisaged response was not achieved:

You struck them ... they felt no anguish

You crushed¹⁰ them ... they refused correction

It is not exactly clear what is implied here, but it might refer to King Josiah's untimely death or things the Babylonian king inflicted on them (cf. Oosterhoff 1990:191; Jones 1992:120).

According to the prophet, Yahweh's corrective actions were in vain. Schmidt (2008:142) remarks: "Der Schlag, der nicht zur Besinnung führt, folgenlos bleibt, bestätigt: Das Volk ist ohne Wahrnehmung, empfindunglos, stumpf."

Another keyword of importance in this verse and this passage is the word "discipline" or "instruction" (מִוֶּסֶר). This noun is also repeated in verse 5. Yahweh's aim was corrective instruction to cause them to come to their senses and to see that they have defiled the covenantal relationship with their attitude.

To emphasise how gravely the relation between the people and Yahweh has deteriorated, the attitude of the people is described as follows:

"they have made their faces harder than a rock" and

"they have refused to turn back"

Jeremiah 5:3 continues to emphasise what Yahweh's attitude towards his people is. Verse 1 has already stated that Yahweh wanted to forgive them and his corrective action mentioned in 5:3 also has the aim of turning them back to him.

Jeremiah 5:4 is a short verse, but contains key words and phrases of importance for our understanding of this passage and in particular Jeremiah. This verse is introduced with ׀, indicating that it relates backwards to what has transpired in the previous verse. The use of the first person pronoun אֲנִי as well as the first person

¹⁰ It is suggested by *BHS* that כָּל־יָדָם (you crushed or consumed them) should be replaced to read "all to them" or even "you humiliated them". There is however no reason to change the text, since the parallel idea expressed as indicated makes sense and emphasises how stubborn the people of Judah had become.

singular *qal* perfect verb (אמר) emphasise that the prophet is reflecting on what he has observed and in response to that speaks his mind. His first inclination was to think that it could only be “insignificant people” (דללים), people of lower rank who would be so ignorant and stubborn to act so foolishly to invoke the anger of Yahweh. Most of the English Bible translations translate this noun as “the poor”. The MT however uses three different words to speak about the poor. Domeris (2007:53) indicates that we can no longer determine the finer nuances of the meaning of these words, but argues that דללים probably refers to the poor peasants.¹¹ He bases his assumption on the work of Daniel Carroll¹² that the reference is to the “small, helpless, powerless, insignificant or dejected ... the equivalent of peasants, forced to work for the benefits of others”. It is clear from the text that not much was expected from these poor working-class people of Judah. It is said that they “do not know the way of Yahweh” - לֹא יָדְעוּ דֶרֶךְ יְהוָה. This phrase is immediately qualified by the reference “the law or justice” (משפט) of Elohim.¹³ What is implied here is that these people at this “lower level” of society, according to the view expressed here by the prophet, were not versed in the Torah and the covenant stipulations. This is the reason why they act foolishly (אל verb *nip'al* perfect 3rd person plural). According to Allen (2008:73) the term “stupid” in reference to the “lower people” is “a wisdom term that carries overtones of moral reprehensibility”.

According to 5:5, the prophet then decides to shift his attention to the “big people”. He will go to these big people (הגדלים) and speak (first person singular verbs) to them. Interestingly the reference to the דללים is without the definite particle, whereas the reference to the גדלים has the definite article. This probably indicates that Jeremiah had a more specific group in mind. Holladay (1986:178) is of the opinion that the prophet refers to the “establishment”, the shapers of opinion, those who set the

¹¹ In Ruth 3:10 the לָךְ is contrasted with the “rich”, and therefore should be translated with “the poor”. In Lev 19:15 both the nouns לָךְ and גָּדוֹל are used, and in Holladay’s view should be understood as meaning the powerless and those with power respectively (Holladay 1986:178). In Amos 2:7 and Prov 10:15 and 14:41 לָךְ in the context of these verses should be translated as “the poor”.

¹² Carroll (1997:951–954).

¹³ See Gen 18:19 that reads: “to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice” (NRS).

pace for the whole community. The “big people” are therefore a reference to the leaders and important people in the Judean society.¹⁴ They are the educated people in society (Oosterhoff 1990:192), therefore the expectation is that they will know “the way of the Lord”, again qualified as in verse 4 by the phrase “the law or justice of Elohim”. Rudolph (1968:37) argues that **משפט** should not here be understood as cultic obedience, but ethically in the sense of daily seeking to live according to the will of Yahweh.

There is clearly a deliberate interplay between the two nouns “the small, insignificant” people (v 4) and the “big” people (v 5). Jeremiah expected much of the leaders (5:5), but to his dismay, they did not reach the bar. This group of people however are not excused on the basis that they are weak or ignorant, but the actions they took show their powerful response to what is expected of them. It is emphatically stated that they as a group or category in the society have broken the yoke (**על**) and burst the bonds (**מוֹסְרוֹת** cf. Jer 2:10). Rom-Shiloni (2014:760) calls the two metaphors used here “metaphors of rebellion”.¹⁵ She argues that they actually derive from a political context and refers to references in the book of Jeremiah where “yoke” is used to indicate subjugation to the king of Babylon (Jer 27:11, 12; 28:2, 4, 11–14). The metaphors are employed in this passage (5:1–6) to indicate that the covenant agreement between Yahweh and the people of Israel were disregarded by the leaders. Their disregard for Yahweh and the covenant stipulations is nothing less than a rebellion against Yahweh in the prophet’s eyes. Jeremiah concludes in 5:5 that these leaders knowingly defied the covenant relationship and disobeyed the stipulations (cf. Allen 2008:73). The two verbs “to break” and “to burst” reflect strong actions showing disregard and rebelliousness (Thompson 1980:238). As Fischer (2005:240) puts it: “In der Verblendung ihrer Macht scheint ihnen als Einziges *Autonomie* zu

¹⁴ In Prov 25:6 a synonymous parallelism relates the king to the great. Oosterhoff (1990:192), referring to Jonah 3:7; 2 Kgs 10:6, 11; Prov 18:16 and 25:6 regards the **הַגְּדֹלִים** to be the rich, the important people, the judges and managers (leaders) in society.

¹⁵ Rom-Shiloni (2014:760) also refers to Lev 26:13 (“I have broken the bars of your yoke” - a reference to salvation from Egypt) and Ps 107:14 (“and burst their bonds apart” - again a reference to a salvific act of Yahweh). She argues that it is difficult to show literary dependence, but it might have been in the mind of the prophet when he blamed the leaders of rebelliously breaking free from the covenant bondage.

zählen.” It is also important to note the wholesale denunciation of the leadership and the people of Judah in the utterance that they “all alike” had broken the yoke. This hyperbolic or exaggerated way of negative speech about the actions of the leaders reveals an underlying frustration with the state of affairs in Jerusalem and the role of the leaders in this.

As a result of what transpired in the society of Judah, 5:6 concludes (על־כֵּן) with an announcement of the consequences of the ignorance and disobedience of the people and leaders of Judah. To express the negative consequences of the findings in the search for people who exercise justice and fidelity towards Yahweh, the prophet employs imagery of wild and fierce animals to depict the enemy from the north¹⁶ threatening the people of Judah (cf. Oosterhoff 1990:192–193; Jones 1992:121; Lundbom 1999:379; Diamond 2003:557). The situation is aptly summarised by Fischer (2005:241) when he says: “Jegliches Verlassen der schützenden Städte endet tödlich, ein *freies Bewegen* ist in der Land *nicht mehr möglich*.” The imagery not only depicts the threat of the enemy to the people (cf. Rochester 2012:22–23), but also the siege of the city and the entrapment of the inhabitants in the city (cf. Allen 2008:73). Death looms outside the gates of the city.

The two important catchwords used in 5:6 to typify the actions of the people of Judah are the nouns transgression (פֶּשַׁע) and apostasy (מְשׁוּבָה). This reminds one of Amos 5:12 where the reference to “many offenses” and “great sins” is used in context of the abuse of the poor. These nouns are utilised here to summarise the issues that were raised in 5:1–5 under the terminology of numerous transgressions (rebellious deeds) and vast acts of faithlessness. In the prophet’s view the only outcome for the rejection of the covenant obligations and the rebellious attitude towards Yahweh is judgement. Jeremiah presented the view that Yahweh alone should be worshiped and that the failure to do so would result in the punishment by Yahweh using an invading enemy such as the Babylonians (cf. Diamond 2003:555).

It arises from this passage that certain expectations the prophet had of the people were not met and that resulted in punishment. In Jeremiah’s view, the people of Judah

¹⁶ Cf. Jer 2:15; 4:6–7; also Hos 13:7f.; Zeph 3:3; Hab 1:8.

and in particular the leaders are to be blamed for the crisis. This is because of their transgressions and apostasy.

Ensuing points of discussion

Rhetoric and imagery

From the discussion of Jeremiah 5:1–6 some important observations need to be addressed. The rhetoric used by the prophet is quite significant and should not go unnoticed. The language is of a hyperbolic nature and surely served a particular purpose. In 5:1 the prophet is looking for a “single person” who is honest and faithful. In the next verse in a generalised sweeping statement it is stated “these people swear falsely”. In verse 3 verbs are used that express very strong actions such as “strike/smite” and “destroy” which imply that no-one survived. This is poetic language that again hyperbolically states that the people underwent severe punishment by Yahweh that caused them anguish and pain. Verse 3 also declares that the people have no remorse, they reject correction, are hard-headed and unwilling to change. In 5:4 the prophet comes to the conclusion that the lower people in the society are foolish and ignorant of what Yahweh requires and the same applies to the elite in the society; they are also clueless (5:5). Those who form part of the establishment show disregard for Yahweh’s will. Jeremiah 5:6 concludes that the rebellious deeds of the people of all walks of life are many and their apostasies great. Even the metaphors used in verse 6 are extremely violent and brutal and add to the tension and anxiety reflected in the passage 5:1–6 (cf. Hayes 2008:212). The picture painted here is that everything and everyone are unfaithful, liars, rebellious and ignorant.

The exaggerated rhetoric and condemning content of the prophet’s message to the people certainly did not escape the attention of exegetes of the passage. One view is that the rhetoric might perhaps reflect a clash of views on what constitutes proper religious observance (cf. Carroll 1986:177). Others regard the hyperbolic nature of his rhetoric as a means of emphasising the importance and seriousness of the message the prophet has to convey and that it concerns everyone in the Judean society (cf. Rudolph 1968:370; Fischer 2005:236). It is also possible that his choice of words and the

sharpness of his rhetoric reveal his frustration with the people who show disregard for Yahweh and the covenant relationship with Yahweh.

An explanation that this paper would like to offer is that the language the prophet uses and the overstatement in his rhetoric is due to a situation of anxiety or severe tension. Most Jeremian scholars will agree that the book of Jeremiah places the prophet in crisis times because of the threat by the enemy from the north. Diamond (2003:556) remarks about the tone underlying the collection of prophetic speeches referring to the enemy from the north saying: “The dramatic tone focuses on imminent threat and alarm. It portrays a community under siege.” Jeremiah 5:1–6 forms part of the collection of prophetic speeches reflecting on the threat by the enemy from the north. In 5:1 it is clearly stated that the setting for the prophet’s proclamation is the city of Jerusalem which is the seat of power of the king and his administration. More than that, it is also the city where the temple of Yahweh is situated. Furthermore, if Jeremiah 5:6 is interpreted correctly, then the text reflects a situation of the city under siege by an enemy, presumably the Babylonian forces (“everyone who goes out of them shall be torn in pieces”). Jerusalem as a besieged city became a confined space, closed off from the outside world (cf. Allen 2008:73). That created a situation of fear, uncertainty and anxiety for the leaders and the people trapped in the city. To substantiate the view of tension, Hayes (2008:208) argues that the string of imperatives used in verse 1 “contributes to the sense of urgency conveyed in this section”. If we further add to this crisis situation the fact that Jeremiah experienced the leadership and the people of Judah to be unfaithful to Yahweh and disobedient to his will expressed as required by the covenant stipulations, then the hyperbolic nature of his diction is understandable. In a tense historical situation, frustrated by the unfaithfulness of leaders and people and their unwillingness to turn back to Yahweh, Jeremiah’s sweeping statements, exaggerated language and condemnation of the people seems understandable. To say this is understandable does not necessarily imply that it is acceptable.

Effects of crisis

It seems that times of crisis and situations of anxiety and frustration affect communication. In a thought provoking study O'Connor (2011:1–6) reads the book of Jeremiah from a perspective of disaster and trauma. She regards the “chaotic” nature of the book as a reflection of the trauma of people who experienced the Babylonian exile. She mentions several characteristics that are associated with people who suffer from post-traumatic stress such as fragmented memories of violence, inability to verbalise experiences, numbness and even loss of faith (O'Connor 2010:39–41; 2011:22–26). Her study on Jeremiah opened many new insights worth pursuing. It should be acknowledged that the literary finalisation of the Jeremiah text occurred some period after the exile and that the compilation and even prosaic commentary often noticeable in the book of Jeremiah reflect later editing of the Jeremiah corpus. Be that as it may, it still seems possible to read some of the prophecies as reflecting the time when they originated or so intended by the literati of the book Jeremiah. Jeremiah 5:1–6 is such a section reflecting the tension of real threat by the Babylonian forces. If this view is considered viable, then it is perhaps not far-fetched to presume that the threat had a physical and emotional impact on the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Although when applying perspectives from disaster and trauma studies we should be cautious about doing so too easily, it is interesting to note in Jeremiah 5 that besides the hyperbolic nature of the prophet's language revealing anxiety and frustration, both the people and the leaders show numbness in response to the prophet's words. It is said of the people of Judah that they are hard-headed, stubborn, refuse to listen to the admonition of the prophet and that they refuse to turn back to Yahweh (5:3). The picture painted here of the people is one that Oosterhoff (1990:192) describes as rigidity and indifference.

O'Connor also mentions the aspect of loss of faith. Verse 3 mentions that that people refused to turn back to Yahweh and 5:5 says of the leaders of the establishment that they “had broken the yoke, they had burst the bonds,” meaning they had rejected the covenant stipulations acting rebellious towards Yahweh. In Jeremiah 5:6 alarming imagery is used to express Yahweh's response to the rebellion and unfaithfulness of

the people and leaders. In response to this violent kind of imagery referring to Yahweh, O'Connor (2010:46–48) states: “But what I see in this shocking imagery is a provisional effort to make sense of the disaster, to hold onto God, to cling mightily to the Creator in the midst of destruction all around.” This depiction of Yahweh’s response to lack of justice and faithfulness when talk about disaster and survival is at stake, is only one side of the matter. The other side is the rhetoric of holding humans responsible for the dire circumstances and their part in the possibility of survival (cf. Seibert 2004:294; O’Connor 2010:47–48).

Leadership matters

Some keywords in this brief passage reveal a great deal about Jeremiah as a leader¹⁷ as he is profiled in the book of Jeremiah, his relationship with Yahweh, what his belief system entails and what informs his leadership. It is clear from these catchwords that Jeremiah works within the framework of a covenant relationship with Yahweh.¹⁸ The brief profile of Jeremiah presented earlier in this article correlates with what we learn about the prophet in Jeremiah 5:1–6. Yahweh is the initiator of this covenant relationship and demands of people to “know the way of Yahweh”. This implies an intimate relationship with Yahweh from which stems a very good understanding of what He regards as “to act justly and faithfully”. Both these terms (מִשְׁפָּט and אֲמוּנָה) are relational terms and imply ethical behaviour. This ties in with the catchword “discipline or instruction” of Yahweh, which implies obedience of the covenant

¹⁷ I regard people of influence and in positions of authority as leaders in society.

¹⁸ One of the most complex matters of research of the Jeremiah text is to determine the redactional activity in the book. There is no doubt that there is strong correspondence between the theology of the book of Deuteronomy and that of Jeremiah. However, people differ to what extent Jeremiah was influenced by the theology of the northern traditions and how heavily the book was edited by the so-called Deuteronomists. Thiel (1973), for instance, attributes much of the material to the Deuteronomistic editing of the Jeremiah text as does Carroll (1986). Maier (2002:356–359) also ascribes the tendency of Jeremiah as a prophet of judgement and doom as due to the Deuteronomistic redaction of the book of Jeremiah in the exilic period. Perhaps a more balanced view would be not to deny Deuteronomistic editing of the book, but also to allow for influence of northern traditions on Jeremiah due to his exposure to the Torah and the Josianic reform efforts (cf. Houston 2006:82).

stipulations (cf. Houston 2006:84). It seems reasonable to draw the conclusion that Jeremiah's worldview influenced his criticism and communication to the people and leaders of his time. If this is true, then it is certainly also true of leaders today. Leaders, and for that matter all people, act from a particular view of life, but criticism of leaders is also informed by the critic's worldview. The validity of Jeremiah's views and criticism thereof should therefore also come under scrutiny (cf. Dempsey 2007:57).

Some of the assumptions drawn from this brief analysis of Jeremiah 5:1–6 find support in other passages in the book of Jeremiah (cf. Jer 7:1–15; 22:15–17). Jeremiah first and foremost had an intimate relationship with Yahweh, which resulted in him understanding the will of Yahweh to be expressed in the Torah and its stipulations. This relationship with Yahweh and intimate knowledge of his revealed will in the Torah resulted in Jeremiah's ardent demand for ethical behaviour. This implied justice and fairness and a quest to be truthful and trustworthy. Emphasis should be placed on the verbs "to do" and "to seek" (cf. 5:1- *עֲשֵׂה מִשְׁפָּט מִבְּקֵשׁ אֱמוּנָה*).

A final observation of key importance is the fact that Jeremiah expected certain behaviour and actions from the people who formed part of the establishment in Jerusalem which he did not expect from the ordinary people (cf. 5:5). In Jeremiah's mind the leadership in Israel and Judah were supposed to be a theocratic leadership with the king and his administration acting on behalf of Yahweh. It is therefore understandable that he required of the leadership to "know the way of Yahweh, the law of Elohim their God". However, as was discussed, these leaders became rebellious and rejected Yahweh by being disobedient to his will and disloyal to the covenant relationship. Jeremiah worked with a cause-and-effect view of life, therefore the disobedience and rebellious attitude of the leaders resulted in Yahweh's punishment by the enemy (Houston 2006:125). It is clear from Jeremiah 5:1–6 that Jeremiah held the leaders in society accountable for the crisis the city of Jerusalem and its people were experiencing. In the long run the leaders in Jerusalem should be held accountable for the fact that Yahweh could not find a reason to forgive the people of Jerusalem (5:1).

CONCLUSION

The conclusion can be drawn that in Jeremiah's view, leaders are accountable. He expects them to have knowledge of what is just, to strive to be faithful to Yahweh and obey his will. Jeremiah also expected less from people who were not as privileged as others in the society and needed others to lead them. But it is also true that Jeremiah did not exempt ordinary people from living ethically sound and faithful. In the end all the people of Judah, the ordinary and the higher ranking people, will bear the consequences of disobedience to Yahweh's moral demands and unfaithfulness. Everything said and done, the fact is the prophet expected those in positions of leadership to adhere to certain ethical obligations as is clear from most of the nouns which appeared in the passage under discussion.

Crisis situations in history have an effect on people's communication, attitudes and responses. Leaders' worldviews and ideologies play a definitive role in their responses to crises. Jeremiah's religious views are reflected in his criticism and demands of people in his society. This is also true as seen from the way the people and leaders in Judah responded to the prophet's proclamation.

Jeremiah 5:1–6 has shown that knowledge and accountability are expected of leaders at all times, but in particular during unstable political times. More is expected of well positioned people than of peasants, the less educated and the people of lesser means.

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