

Jeremiah 5 • How Apostasy Happens

Introduction

There are many examples throughout the Bible of people who become deceived, who embrace the wrong things and end up on the wrong side away from God. How does that happen? Is it possible for **ANYONE** to become deceived? Even a righteous, Bible-believing follower of Christ? Since we are living in a time of growing darkness where more and more people who claim the title “Christian” are embracing non-biblical doctrines and beliefs, we need to understand not just how spiritual falling away happens – what the Bible calls “apostasy” – but how it can be addressed.

¹“Roam to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,

And look now and take note.

And seek in her open squares,

If you can find a man,

If there is one who does justice, who seeks truth,

Then I will pardon her.

²And although they say, ‘As the LORD lives,’

Surely they swear falsely.”

³O LORD, do not Your eyes look for truth?

You have smitten them,

But they did not weaken;

You have consumed them,

But they refused to take correction.

They have made their faces harder than rock;

They have refused to repent.

⁴Then I said, “They are only the poor, They are foolish;

For they do not know the way of the LORD

Or the ordinance of their God.

⁵I will go to the great

And will speak to them,

For they know the way of the LORD

And the ordinance of their God.”

But they too, with one accord, have broken the yoke

And burst the bonds.

⁶Therefore a lion from the forest will slay them,

A wolf of the deserts will destroy them,

A leopard is watching their cities.

Everyone who goes out of them will be torn in pieces,

Because their transgressions are many,

Their apostasies are numerous.

[Read v.1-3]

Q: From what spiritual point does this all begin?

A: There is no one “who does justice, who seek truth”. It begins with the abandonment of God’s Word both in their relationships with others (no justice) and in their relationship with God (no truth).

Q: How would you describe the problem identified in v.2?

A: Their honor and acknowledgment of God goes only so far as their lips. It’s declared to be false by God because it does not come from their heart.

Q: What is the reason revealed in v.3 as to why God invokes discipline?

A: To induce His people to return to the truth, to living according to His Word.

Q: What is supposed to be the result of repentance? Is it enough to acknowledge and believe in God?

A: Acknowledgment and belief are not enough because that was the problem identified in v.2, that it’s just lip service. Biblical repentance is always visible by a return to God’s truth – His Word.

[Read v.4-6]

Q: How are the people Jeremiah attempts to reach here different than in the opening verses?

A: He moves on from the “common folk” to those who are supposed to be the pillars of the community, so to speak.

Q: What was discovered about both groups?

A: Even though their socio-economic status may be different, they both suffer from the exact same problem: (1) they don’t “know the way of the LORD” (v.4, 5), and (2) they don’t know “the ordinance of their God”. (v.4, 5) They don’t have the truth of God in them in general (knowing His ways) or specifically (knowing His ordinances).

Point: Money and statue have no connection to the degree one adheres to the truth of God’s Word. All are held to the same standard, and likewise found falling short of same.

Q: What is the meaning of the wild beasts in v.6?

A: Certainly there are multiple layers of meaning, but two that relate to the context of Jeremiah and his going to the greater people of his day: (1) they represent the judgments to come over the whole of Judah from outside forces beginning with the Babylonians, and (2) they represent the internal results of having rejected God’s Word in that their own kings (lion), false teachers (wolf), and unfaithful priesthood (leopard) will turn

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and devour their own both spiritually and in taking advantage of the rest. It's the dual message of spiritual destruction both from without and within.

Q: God uses two specific terms as the chief characteristics which identify those who reject His Word. What do they mean?

- “Transgressions” can always be read as “rebellion”. It describes consciously choosing to reject God’s ways for one’s own.
- “Apostasies” is taking rebellion a step further to completely reject God. It is always applied to someone who at one time had come into an intimate knowledge of God before rejecting Him, as opposed to a non-believer who never knew God to begin with.

Point: Continued rejection of God's Word leads to rebellion, knowingly going against God's ways in favor of another.

⁷“Why should I pardon you?
Your sons have forsaken Me
And sworn by those who are not gods.
When I had fed them to the full,
They committed adultery
And trooped to the harlot’s house.
⁸They were well-fed lusty horses,
Each one neighing after his neighbor’s
wife.
⁹Shall I not punish these people,” declares
the LORD,
“And on a nation such as this
Shall I not avenge Myself?”

[Read v.7-9]

Q: Why are the people – at this point in time – not deserving of God’s exemption from judgment?

A: They have not exhibited any signs of remorse, sorrow, or repentance. In fact, they have taken the blessings of God and devoted them to their own ungodly pursuits.

Point: This is one of the key indicators of apostasy: Devoting the things of God to the pursuit of one’s own desires while rejecting His.

¹⁰“Go up through her vine rows and
destroy,
But do not execute a complete
destruction;
Strip away her branches,
For they are not the LORD’S.
¹¹For the house of Israel and the house of
Judah
Have dealt very treacherously with Me,”
declares the LORD.
¹²They have lied about the LORD
And said, “Not He;
Misfortune will not come on us,
And we will not see sword or famine.
¹³The prophets are as wind,
And the word is not in them.
Thus it will be done to them!”

[Read v.10-13]

Q: What is the nature of God’s next step as described in v.10?

A: A kind of “pruning” to remove all the unspiritual branches so that only the few spiritual will remain.

Q: How does their continued behavior further erode God’s Word?

A: They continue to twist and re-interpret God’s Word to satisfy their own meaning, even to the point of justifying their own actions. Their declarations that their own actions are somehow exempt from God’s judgment is, in fact, a lie.

Point: The unaddressed rejection of God's Word leads to rebellion, apostasy, and finally to embracing the opposite of the truth. It's a process by which they've exchanged the truth for a lie. They even begin espousing the lie as the truth.

Q: What is the ultimate irony of the result of apostasy?

A: What they call a “word” from God, God Himself calls “wind”. Their behavior and choices have not just merely rendered God’s Word ineffective for them personally, but replaced it with something that is nothing more than an illusion, something completely ineffective.

¹⁴Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of hosts,
“Because you have spoken this word, Behold, I am making My words in your mouth fire
And this people wood, and it will consume them.
¹⁵Behold, I am bringing a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel,” declares the LORD.
“It is an enduring nation,
It is an ancient nation,
A nation whose language you do not know,
Nor can you understand what they say.
¹⁶Their quiver is like an open grave,
All of them are mighty men.
¹⁷They will devour your harvest and your food;
They will devour your sons and your daughters;
They will devour your flocks and your herds;
They will devour your vines and your fig trees;
They will demolish with the sword your fortified cities in which you trust.

¹⁸“Yet even in those days,” declares the LORD, “I will not make you a complete destruction. ¹⁹It shall come about when they say, ‘Why has the LORD our God done all these things to us?’ then you shall say to them, ‘As you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you will serve strangers in a land that is not yours.’”

²⁰“Declare this in the house of Jacob
And proclaim it in Judah, saying,
²¹‘Now hear this, O foolish and senseless people,
Who have eyes but do not see;
Who have ears but do not hear.
²²Do you not fear Me?’ declares the LORD.
‘Do you not tremble in My presence?
For I have placed the sand as a boundary for the sea,
An eternal decree, so it cannot cross over it.
Though the waves toss, yet they cannot prevail;
Though they roar, yet they cannot cross over it.
²³But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart;

[Read v.14-17]

Q: So what is the logical result of rebellion and apostasy?

A: Coming to know God’s Word and then choosing to reject it results in complete destruction according to God’s judgment.

Point: *God’s Word does either one of two things: produces righteousness where it is accepted, or eradicates unrighteousness where it is not. It either purifies an accepting person, making them fit for the presence of God, or purges them from God’s presence to make pure all that is before God.*

Q: What is the common denominator to all the things which judgment will take away?

A: They’re all the multiplied blessings of this physical life, the things that one would hope grows into bigger and better things for them and their heirs. Their loss corresponds to the type of like **spiritual** loss that will be experienced.

[Read v.18-19]

Q: What is the familiar biblical principle at work here?

A: You reap what you sow.

Q: Why do you suppose that biblical remnants are so small?

A: Probably because rebellion is so extensive that so few are left who are capable of learning the right lesson from it.

[Read v.20-29]

Q: What are the defining characteristics of those God calls “foolish and senseless”?

- They “have eyes but do not see”
- They “have ears but do not hear”
- This is because they have no “fear” – appropriate respect – of God.

Point: *If you don’t truly believe God’s Word to begin with, either His promises of blessings for obedience or judgment for disobedience, you have no incentive to follow God’s Word. Spiritual blindness is caused not by having a special restriction by God to not see nor hear nor understand, but by a basic lack of respect of Him and His Word.*

Q: How do we know that these who are “stubborn” and possessing a “rebellious heart” at one time were drawn to God but have now rejected Him?

A: According to v.23, they have “turned aside and departed”. Scripture repeatedly uses the teaching of staying on or straying from the path as

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They have turned aside and departed.
²⁴They do not say in their heart,
“Let us now fear the LORD our God,
Who gives rain in its season,
Both the autumn rain and the spring rain,
Who keeps for us
The appointed weeks of the harvest.”
²⁵Your iniquities have turned these away,
And your sins have withheld good from
you.
²⁶For wicked men are found among My
people,
They watch like fowls lying in wait;
They set a trap,
They catch men.
²⁷Like a cage full of birds,
So their houses are full of deceit;
Therefore they have become great and
rich.
²⁸They are fat, they are sleek,
They also excel in deeds of wickedness;
They do not plead the cause,
The cause of the orphan, that they may
prosper;
And they do not defend the rights of the
poor.
²⁹Shall I not punish these people?
declares the LORD,
‘On a nation such as this
Shall I not avenge Myself?’

³⁰“An appalling and horrible thing
Has happened in the land:
³¹The prophets prophesy falsely,
And the priests rule on their own
authority;
And My people love it so!
But what will you do at the end of it?

maintaining or rejecting a right relationship with God. To have one's feet at one time set upon the path means that at one time the people referred to followed God's ways. Subsequently they have chosen to leave Him for another path.

Point: *In v.24 this is also identified as the action of someone who does not “fear the LORD”. If you maintain the proper respect for God and His Word, you don't stray from His path for another.*

Q: What does v.25 identify as the things for which the rebellious and apostate reject God?

A: “Iniquities” and “sins”. Basically they are backslidden to the point that they want to wholly take up the old life they originally, albeit temporarily, forsook for Christ.

Q: How do the remaining verses describe the basic behavior of the apostate?

A: “They...excel in deeds of wickedness”. (v.28) Their appetite is focused on consuming others, at elevating and enriching their self at the expense of others.

Point: *The apostate are identified with the very characteristics of Satan himself, pride and greed.*

In Summary

- *The don't fear God.*
- *They become spiritually blind.*
- *They leave their walk with Christ for another.*
- *They pursue the sins of the old life.*
- *They seek personal gain at the expense of others.*

[Read v.30-31]

Q: How does this teach about the great apostasy to come which the Bible predicts for these Last Days?

A: There is a lack of accountability at all levels. It's not just that there are false prophets, nor that there are just false teachers, but that they are encouraged by the people in general.

Point: *One might way that the one side wants to deceive and the other wants to be deceived by their choice to reject God's Word and pursue their own sinful desires.*

Epilogue

It's important to mention that no one can deceive you as long as you continue to be committed to an obedient relationship with Christ. It's only when you decide to pursue sin that a deceiver's words can take root and produce harmful results. The clear connection here is that personal sin leads to deception, not the other way around.

This is why it's not enough to merely identify who is a false teacher or what might be a false teaching. Knowledge is never enough by itself to save. What is needed is sincere and moral repentance of sinful behavior from the heart. The problem is not simply rejecting God's Word, but rejecting it in concert with the pursuit of sin. It's an issue of the heart. This is why we must hold others accountable for sin and seek for the issues of sin to be addressed.

There is no revival possible without repentance accompanied by a commitment to cease from further sin.

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