

Jeremiah 7-8:17 • When Condemnation Is Warranted

Introduction

This is not a “happy” lesson. But in the Bible a spiritual condition labeled “apostasy” is identified. What does that term actually mean? How can we tell the difference between full-blown apostasy and someone merely struggling in their day-to-day faith? In these verses the characteristics of apostasy are provided as well as the inevitable results if it is allowed to work to its logical completion. This is a very important lesson teaching how to discern when the spiritual condition of apostasy is actually present and to further understand the behaviors which specifically identify it. Ultimately this allows us to identify what is actually going on when this condition is found to exist.

¹The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, ²“Stand in the gate of the LORD’S house and proclaim there this word and say, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah, who enter by these gates to worship the LORD!’” ³Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. ⁴Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’” ⁵For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor, ⁶if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin, ⁷then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

[Read 7:1-7]

Q: To whom did God address this message? Is God primarily warning non-believers?

A: By the fact that Jeremiah is commanded, “Stand in the gate of the LORD’S house” (v.2) God is speaking to those called to be His people.

Point: The repeated biblical pattern during every age and up to this present time leading into the Last Days is that judgment **always** begins first with God’s house.

Q: What is the false hope to which God’s people cling?

A: They believe because the Temple was chosen by God as His peculiar dwelling that it could never be destroyed and therefore they are automatically protected. They come to believe that the external, ceremonial observances of religion supersede the actual need for putting His Word and ways into practice in their lives.

Q: What might be significant about the triple repeating of the phrase in v.4?

A: The triple repetition of “the temple of the LORD” expresses intense confidence. In the Hebrew language such a repetition is the strongest way possible of reinforcing what is important, which is true when **GOD** uses triple repetition, but not necessarily when man does. (See also Jer. 22:29 and Is. 6:3)

Q: What is God’s two-fold suggested remedy for the fallacy of their belief?

1. “Do not trust in deceptive words...” (v.4)
2. “...truly amend your ways and your deeds...” (v.5)

Point: The work of revival among God’s people always begins with a call to return to His Word and to put His Word into practice.

Q: What is notable about the list of things God provides in v.5-6 which specifically address what their “ways” and “deeds” should be?

A: Only one of the four items is associated with the 1st Tablet to love God (“nor walk after other gods”); the first three belong to the 2nd Tablet to love others.

Point: God often proves that His people don’t actually love Him by the fact that their actions prove they don’t actually love others. Coming to the Temple to continue the associated rituals and practices is never a substitute for living His Word genuinely from the heart.

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⁸“Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail. ⁹Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, ¹⁰then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—that you may do all these abominations? ¹¹Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,” declares the LORD.

¹²“But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I made My name dwell at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. ¹³And now, because you have done all these things,” declares the LORD, “and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you but you did not answer, ¹⁴therefore, I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. ¹⁵I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim.

Q: What will be the inevitable consequences to God’s people if they appropriately change their ways and deeds as specified?

A: According to v.7 they will be allowed to continue to fulfill their calling and legacy. The clear implication is that failure to so repent will inevitably result in their removal from same.

[Read 7:8-15]

Q: What is biblically significant about God repeating His warning not to trust “in deceptive words”?

A: Throughout Scripture God emphasizes the extreme seriousness and importance of something by repeating it.

Q: What is significant about how God identifies their breaking His 2nd Tablet commandments in v.9 with His prior mention in v.5-6?

A: In v.5-6 were listed doing justice and neither oppressing others or shedding innocent blood. These are all behaviors towards all people in general, whereas the references to stealing, murder, adultery, and false witness are all sins which are committed against individuals. They are not just unloving to others in general, but in the day-to-day details of their individual relationships. It’s a picture of the complete corruption of the 2nd Tablet.

Q: What is significant about how God identifies their breaking His 1st Tablet commandments in v. 9 with His prior mention in v.6?

A: The general reference in v.6 that they “walk after other gods” is enhanced to specifically reference Baal worship in v.9. “Baal” is the Hebrew word for “husband” and “master”, so this represents the worst scenario wherein God’s people become so completely unfaithful that they are likened to a bride who forsakes her husband for another or a servant who embraces a new master.

Q: What is the sum result of these sins in v.10-11? What is the true nature of their spiritual condition?

A: They come to believe that even though they live in sin which contradicts God’s Word and ways that because they keep the outward traditions they are still saved. Ultimately God’s house becomes “a den of robbers”, the ultimate expression of people who use the things of God to enrich themselves at the expense of others. It’s the ultimate corruption of what God originally intended.

Q: What actual historical event should have served to testify to God’s people that the Temple was not some kind of universal insurance policy preventing them from experiencing God’s judgment?

A: The Tabernacle, the original “Temple”, had been originally established in Shiloh in Joshua’s day (Joshua 18:1; Judges 18:31) and came to an end in the time of Eli and Samuel. The ark was temporarily given into the hands of the Philistines and only parts of the Tabernacle appear to have survived and used apart from the ark for a very long time until the first Temple was built to bring all these things together again.

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Q: What second historical event was supposed to be an even greater example to Judah at this time?

A: That just as the southern kingdom of Judah witnessed the destruction of God's people in the northern kingdom of Israel ("*all the offspring of Ephraim*"), so they should learn from that example of unfaithfulness. (Note: "*Offspring of Ephraim*" refers to anyone who rejected God; it is not a reference to just the ten tribes who primarily comprised the northern kingdom of Israel. Faithful members of every tribe relocated to the physical land of Judah so that "*Ephraim*" becomes a reference to all the unfaithful and Judah to all the faithful. But even those purported to be faithful have to actually remain so.)

Summary

The problem non-believers face in the shadow of God's judgment is that they rejected God's Word and ways in favor of continuing to live by whatever measure they desired. By definition God's people are those who at one time not only acknowledge Him but make some kind of effort to live according to His ways. Because of their failure to live a committed life, God's people cling to fallacies which lead to self-deception. All spiritual deception is the result of continually and consistently walking according to one's own desires so that eventually they are given over to them.

¹⁶“As for you, do not pray for this people, and do not lift up cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with Me; for I do not hear you.

[Read 7:16]

Q: What is the greater meaning of God's command to Jeremiah?

A: A time can come, even for God's people, where the opportunity to repent comes to an end. This is provided to show that their disobedience and self-deception is so institutionalized and established that a point has been reached from which escape from God's judgment is no longer possible.

Point: *God will reiterate this command to Jeremiah three more times. (Jer. 11:14; 14:11; 15:1) And even John, known as "The Love Apostle" provides a parallel instruction:*

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.

– 1 John 5:16

¹⁷Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? ¹⁸The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods in order to spite Me. ¹⁹Do they spite Me?" declares the LORD. "Is it not themselves they spite, to their own shame?" ²⁰Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, My anger and My wrath will be poured out on this place, on man and on beast and on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground; and it will burn and not be

[Read 7:17-20]

Q: God now provides a list of things which are the defining characteristics of those who were once God's people but are now on the inevitable path to judgment. (This is also called "apostasy".) What is the first characteristic provided in v.17-18?

A: They don't merely worship other gods, but they do things ("*make cakes*" and "*pour out drink offerings*") which have the appearance of things they were supposed to do for the One True God. In other words, they are so corrupt that they keep the outward appearance of the Law while applying it falsely.

quenched.”

²¹Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat flesh. ²²For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. ²³But this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the way which I command you, that it may be well with you.’ ²⁴Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward. ²⁵Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending them. ²⁶Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck; they did more evil than their fathers.

²⁷“You shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you; and you shall call to them, but they will not answer you. ²⁸You shall say to them, ‘This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God or accept correction; truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth.

²⁹‘Cut off your hair and cast it away, And take up a lamentation on the bare heights; For the LORD has rejected and forsaken The generation of His wrath.’

³⁰“For the sons of Judah have done that which is evil in My sight,” declares the LORD, “they have set their detestable things in the house which is called by My name, to defile it. ³¹They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come

Q: What is the next characteristic in v.19?

A: Their self-deception runs so deep that they don't realize they are hurting themselves.

Q: What is the third characteristic in v.20?

A: Their corruption becomes so entrenched that the only way God can properly address it is to completely consume them. They can't be “cleansed” or “purified” – they must be eliminated.

[Read 7:21-26]

Q: What is the chief characteristic of the apostate provided in these verses?

A: They are likened to the first generation rescued from Egypt who refused to live a changed life from the heart going forward and suffered God's judgment, not being allowed to enter the Promised Land.

Application: “Egypt” throughout Scripture represents the old life from which we were saved. We are repeatedly warned not to return to that life or consequences will be experienced just like the literal Israelites under Moses.

Q: How did the people in this example further compound their disobedience?

A: They didn't just return to the old life, but they repeatedly ignored “all My servants the prophets”. (v.25) They didn't just disobey one time or temporarily backslide, but at each and every opportunity to repent and return they consistently refused and continued in their own ways.

Point: Judgment doesn't come for missing something “once” or temporarily straying a bit, but by the consistent and stout refusal to change. Such consistent refusal actually becomes a lifestyle leading to the inevitable consequences of judgment.

[Read 7:27-31]

Q: What is the next characteristic provided in v.27-29?

A: They eventually arrive at the point where they no longer respond to the Truth of God's Word.

Q: What is significant about the reference in v.29 to “cut off your hair and cast it away”?

A: Hair was a symbol or covering or protection. So the result of casting away God's Word is to also cast away His covering or protection.

Q: What characteristic is addressed in v.30?

A: They become so self-deceived that they see nothing wrong with bringing right into the very house of God the things which by His Word are stated to “defile it”.

Application: This is at the heart of what is going on today in particular with Emergent Church and Ecumenical practices which bring false religious practices right into the walls of churches once thought to have been Evangelical, Bible-believing organizations.

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into My mind.

⁴You shall say to them, “Thus says the LORD,

“Do men fall and not get up again?
Does one turn away and not repent?
⁵Why then has this people, Jerusalem,
Turned away in continual apostasy?
They hold fast to deceit,
They refuse to return.

⁶I have listened and heard,
They have spoken what is not right;
No man repented of his wickedness,
Saying, ‘What have I done?’
Everyone turned to his course,
Like a horse charging into the battle.
⁷Even the stork in the sky
Knows her seasons;
And the turtledove and the swift and the thrush
Observe the time of their migration;
But My people do not know
The ordinance of the LORD.

⁸“How can you say, ‘We are wise,
And the law of the LORD is with us’?
But behold, the lying pen of the scribes
Has made it into a lie.

⁹The wise men are put to shame,
They are dismayed and caught;
Behold, they have rejected the word of
the LORD,

And what kind of wisdom do they have?

¹⁰Therefore I will give their wives to
others,

Their fields to new owners;
Because from the least even to the
greatest

Everyone is greedy for gain;
From the prophet even to the priest
Everyone practices deceit.

¹¹They heal the brokenness of the
daughter of My people superficially,
Saying, ‘Peace, peace,’
But there is no peace.

¹²Were they ashamed because of the
abomination they had done?
They certainly were not ashamed,

Q: What is addressed in v.31?

A: First they merely corrupted worship associated with God’s House, then they brought in outside influences, and now they completely embrace outright wrong worship practices of the worst kind, actually engaging in child sacrifice.

Application: *When the protection of God’s Word is withdrawn because of the persistent pursuit of false practices, self-deception inevitably leads to embracing outright wrong practices and doctrine leading to judgment.*

[Read 8:4-7]

Q: What characteristic of apostasy is detailed in these verses?

A: The steadfast refusal to heed God’s Word and repent of their ways.

Q: Why is this likened to “a horse charging into battle”?

A: It’s what happens to a horse caught up in the emotion and intensity of war, which charges forward regardless of the consequences, completely guided by its rider. In this case, the rider is disobedience resulting in deception.

Q: How is the basic problem of God’s people characterized in v.7?

A: “But My people do not know the ordinance of the LORD”.

Point: *The Hebrew word “ordinances” is a derivative of “judgment”, what we might today call “case law”. It embodies verdicts or outcomes or formal decrees established while resolving a situation brought before a court. This is really a description of the practical application of God’s Law in situation not specifically spelled out word for word so that God’s people might understand how God’s Word is applicable to every situation and that there aren’t really any loopholes. What this ultimately describes here is a people who no longer understand how to practically apply God’s Word.*

[Read 8:8-12]

Q: How would you summarize the final characteristic provided in these verses?

A: Rejection of God’s Word and ways is so pervasive that it is not merely limited to the general population of the people, but embraces every level of their leadership.

1. “...the lying pen of the scribes...” (v.8)
2. “The wise men are put to shame...” (v.9)
3. “From the prophet even to the priest everyone practices deceit.” (v.10)

Q: How is the spiritual corruption of leadership proved? What are the visible and tangible proofs God points to?

1. “...the law of the LORD...the lying pen of the scribes has made it into a lie”. (v.8)
2. “...Everyone is greedy for gain...” (v.10)
3. “...Everyone practices deceit...” (v.10)
4. “They heal the brokenness of the daughter of My people superficially, saying ‘Peace, peace,’ but there is no peace.” (v.11)
5. “...because of the abomination they have done...were not ashamed...they did not know how to blush...” (v.12)

And they did not know how to blush;
Therefore they shall fall among those
who fall;
At the time of their punishment they shall
be brought down,”
Says the LORD.

Point: All of these things are the ultimate corruption of God's Word. It's not merely a "misinterpretation" or lack of information, but redefining God's Word to the point that it is represented to mean the very opposite of God's plain and simple original meaning. It becomes the structure by which they attempt to justify their wickedness and false worship.

Application: How do we see evidence of this today in the plethora of false teachers and false movements abounding within the so-called church?

Summary

These things combine to provide a detailed definition of "apostasy". This is the spiritual condition resulting in people who at one time at least claimed to follow God's Word and ways but turned away to continually pursue their own course away from the cross. This is different from being "backslidden" or in a temporary state of sin but returning to the right path. These are the behaviors and characteristics of people who turn away from God to such a degree that His judgment upon them is the inevitable, final outcome:

1. (7:17-18) They misapply the things of God in the course of false worship.
2. (7:19) Their self-deception runs so deep that they don't realize they are hurting themselves.
3. (7:20) Their corruption becomes so entrenched that the only way God can properly address it is to completely consume them.
4. (7:21-26) They don't just disobey one time or temporarily backslide, but at each and every opportunity to repent and return they consistently refuse and continue in their own ways just like the first generation of Israelites coming out of Egypt who never made it into the Promised Land.
5. (7:27-29) They eventually arrive at the point where they no longer respond to the Truth of God's Word.
6. (7:30) They become so self-deceived that they see nothing wrong with bringing right into the very house of God the things which by His Word are stated to outright "defile it".
7. (7:31) First they merely corrupted worship associated with God's House, then they brought in outside influences, and now they completely embrace outright wrong worship practices of the worst kind, actually engaging in child sacrifice.
8. (8:4-7) They come to a point where they no longer know how to properly apply God's Word.
9. (8:8-12) Rejection of God's Word and ways becomes so pervasive that it is not merely limited to the general population of the people, but embraces every level of their leadership.

Application: What parallel to these things can be observed among God's people in these Last Days?

[Read 7:32-34]

³²“Therefore, behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when it will no longer be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of the Slaughter; for they will bury in Topheth because there is no other place. ³³The dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the sky and for the beasts of the earth; and no one will frighten them away. ³⁴Then I will make to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of joy and

Q: What is significant about the valley here referenced which sits just outside the city of Jerusalem?

A: This is the city trash dump which burned continually. In the New Testament Jesus would refer to it as the visible example of what hell is like. This has literal fulfillments in the invasion of Babylon and the final judgment of Armageddon to come, but has a greater spiritual representation of what happens to those who consistently rebel and refuse to return: hell.

the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land will become a ruin.

¹“At that time,” declares the LORD, “they will bring out the bones of the kings of Judah and the bones of its princes, and the bones of the priests and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem from their graves. ²They will spread them out to the sun, the moon and to all the host of heaven, which they have loved and which they have served, and which they have gone after and which they have sought, and which they have worshiped. They will not be gathered or buried; they will be as dung on the face of the ground. ³And death will be chosen rather than life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family, that remains in all the places to which I have driven them,” declares the LORD of hosts.

¹³“I will surely snatch them away,” declares the LORD; “There will be no grapes on the vine And no figs on the fig tree, And the leaf will wither; And what I have given them will pass away.””
¹⁴Why are we sitting still? Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the fortified cities And let us perish there, Because the LORD our God has doomed us And given us poisoned water to drink, For we have sinned against the LORD.
¹⁵We waited for peace, but no good came; For a time of healing, but behold, terror!

¹⁶From Dan is heard the snorting of his horses; At the sound of the neighing of his stallions The whole land quakes; For they come and devour the land and its fullness, The city and its inhabitants.
¹⁷“For behold, I am sending serpents against you, Adders, for which there is no charm, And they will bite you,” declares the LORD.

[Read 8:1-3]

Q: What consequences await the few who deserve God's judgment but somehow manage to live through it?

A: In the end the same death and separation awaits them. They weren't immediately taken in the course of the execution of God's wrath, but nonetheless the same ultimate fate awaits them in the end.

[Read 8:13-15]

Q: What ultimately happens to the corrupt leaders who continued to lead the people in rebellion and disobedience?

A: They reap what they sow (v.13), they are ultimately killed by the deception to which God ultimately gave them over to (“*poisoned water to drink*” in v.14), and nothing they falsely predicted came true. In the end they are faced with the fact, “*For we have sinned against the LORD*”. (v.14)

[Read 8:16-17]

Q: What is probably significant about the reference to Dan in this context?

A: Dan is the tribe described in Judges who left the land assigned to them by God and went north on their own to establish themselves contrary to God's instructions. Along the way they introduced idolatry of the worst kind among the whole of Israel which appeared in many respects to mimic God's Word but in reality completely corrupted it. In the end, Dan is forever destroyed and is never heard from again, not being mentioned at all in Revelation. Their place is taken over by Joseph's sons. Just like Judas, one of the Twelve, Dan is permanently removed.

Q: What is the significance of an attack by serpents?

A: It's the biblical metaphor for deception as represented by what Satan first did in the Garden of Eden. The end destination of deception is the same as experienced by Dan – total destruction.

Overall Application

“Apostasy” is not being in a temporary backslidden state or occasionally straying from God’s Word, but the consistent path away from God’s Word to the point that it becomes a lifestyle leading to self-deception, first misusing the things of God and ultimately bringing in things never associated with God to begin with. It is the path to hell, death, and permanent removal. What are the similarities to behaviors and teachings that you see in the church today?

NOTE: Verse 11 is quoted in the Gospels when Jesus clears the temple. Given the overall context of the teaching in which this reference is contained, can you see that it pertains to something greater than just a misguided people? Do you see how Jesus was addressing spiritual corruption and deception so pervasive that it was inevitably leading to hell and permanent destruction?