

JUDGES

Jeremiah 2:1-13

Sometimes the better we have it in life, the worse we become as persons. It seems that we just can't stand success. It seems that we just can't stand success. All of us probably know someone who came up the hard way. He or she might have been reared in a broken home, maybe grew up on the "wrong side the tracks" and would be what we might call a "disadvantaged" youngster. Sometimes such young people rise above their financial and social circumstances. While it is great when a person rises above their financial and social circumstances, it is more important to rise above the ethical and moral norms of that which is sometime found in dysfunctional families so that the successes achieved socially and financially are used to create a life that helps to improve his or her sphere of influence. Failure in this ethical and moral area can produce a person who is politically smart enough to cultivate the right relationships, knowing that most people don't look beyond the surface of what a person does or who a person is. Therefore, energies are directed toward making the right impressions rather than substantive growth. When a good moral foundation is missing, then the lives of such people are essentially facades as they have what appears to be a "wonderful life" while being morally corrupt.

Such a person is a picture of the nation of Israel. They too came up the hard way, came out of a life of slavery and yet they enjoyed the blessing and leading of God that brought them to be a great nation, powerful and respected. Little by little they drifted away from the true inner goodness that made them great to a totally apostate society that could not tell good from evil nor evil from good. Even after the Northern Kingdom (Israel) fell to the Assyrians the Southern Kingdom (Judah) continued on in their same way going headlong and head strong toward destruction. God called Jeremiah to confront the nation of Judah to point out their sin and to call for repentance. The nation had abandoned their covenant relationship and responsibilities to the Lord and faced judgement. Jeremiah's message purpose was to direct the nation back to God.

Remember? – 2:1-3

¹ The word of the LORD came to me, saying, ² "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD, "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. ³ Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest. All who ate of it incurred guilt; disaster came upon them, declares the LORD." Jeremiah 2:1-3 (ESV)

God's message through Jeremiah reminded the people of the relationship with God that is possible, one that their ancestors had experienced when God rescued them from Egypt, led them through the wilderness and brought them into the Promised Land. The relationship between God and Israel is often pictured as being a husband-wife relationship. In the engagement time and right after the marriage the thoughts of the bride are almost totally directed to the bridegroom. Wherever the husband would go, she would follow him without regard to any personal ambition. In this same way, the nation of Israel had followed the Lord wherever He led. You recall that God sent a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. These people had separated themselves from the rest of the world and were special to God. That is what the word "holiness" means. "Israel was holy unto the Lord" means that they were set apart from the world and for the use of God. Because of that unique relationship, the Lord defended them by sending "evil" upon all that would offend them.

The phrase "the firstfruits of His harvest" is likely a reference to God's sovereign plan to redeem all humanity from their enslaved relationship to other gods in the same way He had

saved the people of Israel from Egyptian slavery. After the flood, the descendants of Noah had grown and populated the region around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and had abandon their devotion to God in an effort to create a Utopian world by ascending into the spiritual realm through their own efforts. Specifically, this effort was manifested in a united effort to build a tower so they could ascend into heaven. This effort was thwarted by God by confusing their language so that they could not communicate clearly with one another and they were scattered to various part of the earth and since they had abandoned YHWH as their God, they came under the influence of multiple other gods to which the people were enslaved. It was after this scattering that God called Abram to a relationship and a mission that would culminate in all the nations of the earth being blessed through a restored relationship with God.

The implication of the statement that “all who ate of it incurred guilt” (ESV) or “All that devour him will offend” (NKJV) is likely a reference to the promise that God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 that reads “I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you.”

Things were great for a while and then the nation began to drift away from God and to adopt the ways of the world.

Forgotten? – 2:4-8

⁴ Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the clans of the house of Israel. ⁵ Thus says the LORD: “What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless? ⁶ They did not say, ‘Where is the LORD who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that none passes through, where no man dwells?’ ⁷ And I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination. ⁸ The priests did not say, ‘Where is the LORD?’ Those who handle the law did not know me; the shepherds transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit. Jeremiah 2:4–8 (ESV)

These people had no one to blame but themselves. They were led into a land that was already establish and operating with vineyards and orchards and the people had it made. It was a cornucopia, a horn or plenty. Soon after they got there, they defiled the land by doing things that were contrary to God's way. In fact, in the next verse we see that the nation acted as if God did not matter. This sorry state of affairs permeated the entire society from the priest to the laity, from the paupers to the princes. The people had wandered and drifted away from God, but even the priests were so unaware of what was happening that they did not even think to ask, “Hey, where is God?” They did not miss Him because God was not a priority in their lives.

Are we any different today? Do we really see a whole lot of evidence of the presence and working of the Holy Spirit in the life of most of the churches in our nation? Some churches are more concerned about who is going to run the denominational organization than about preaching the word of God which is a priority issue. In Jeremiah’s day even those people who were most familiar with the Law and had copied portions of it did not really know God. It was as if their calling were no more than a job. One of the concerns that many people have expressed about our seminaries is that some of those that teach there do not believe in the fundamental truths of the Bible even though we would expect them to be familiar with what the Scriptures teach.

It is likely that they do not believe because they have never had a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. In Judah, the leaders of the people (the pastors or shepherds) were just as big offenders of the laws of God as other people. The prophets were to be God's representatives to the people (contrast this with the role of the priest whose function was to be the people's representative to God). Yet they taught and represented the philosophies and ideas of Baal (the fertility god of the Canaanites) to the people and tried to pass these ideas and philosophies off as

belonging to YHWH. In some denominations and churches, the very same things are happening today! The ideas and philosophies of secular humanism, pop psychology, and wokism are preached and proclaimed from the pulpits of places that call themselves churches and the people who are listening to it are starving to death spiritually and are so weak from lack of nourishment that they don't even know what is happening to them. We have embraced another god that is being proclaimed and is thinly disguised to look like the God of the Bible. The nation of Judah had changed their true God for something that was not a god. We look at them and sometimes think "How could they do something so foolish?" and yet we can see that our nation that was founded on Christian principles and active trust in God drifted away from God. For most, it was not a conscious decision but a gradual thing. After this sort of drifting goes on long enough, then we find that we end up running headlong and headstrong toward destruction. We, who have the historical accounts of what happen to Israel and Judah ought to truly be astonished that it is happening today and that it is happening to our nation. Similarly, God was astonished by the behavior of Israel as we see in His message to Judah through Jeremiah.

Exchanged? – 2:9-13

⁹ “Therefore I still contend with you, declares the LORD, and with your children’s children I will contend. ¹⁰ For cross to the coasts of Cyprus and see, or send to Kedar and examine with care; see if there has been such a thing. ¹¹ Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. ¹² Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, ¹³ for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. Jeremiah 2:9–13 (ESV)

God will not sit idly by and let His people go. He confronts us with our sin. He challenges us to consider the rationality of what we are doing. Even the heathen do not casually change gods. Though these descendants of Abraham had turned their collective backs against YHWH and had gone after other gods in the same way the Gentile nations had, God was not going to just give up on them because He had a sovereign plan by which He would restore a right relationship with all humanity. That plan centered upon the promised “seed” (that is referenced in Genesis 3:15 and again in Genesis 22:18) that would come from the tribe of Judah. Their transgression did not make Him turn away from them; however, it did profoundly modify the whole relation between God and them. That relationship took on an aspect of “contention” to the way God would deal with them.

Of course, the purpose of God pleading or contending with them was to get them to see the error of their ways and then repent and turn back to Him. How did this “contending” work out in the case of Judah? Just as was promised in Moses’ message to the nation before they entered the Promised Land nearly a thousand years before the time of Jeremiah, there were famines, pestilence, crop failures, droughts, fires, earthquakes, and oppression and defeat by their enemies. All of these redemptive judgments were intended to initiate reforms so that the Jews would return to God.

God then expressed His astonishment regarding the way Israel and now Judah was behaving considering all the blessings God had poured out upon them in the past. God had been good to them as contrasted with the relationship of the pagan nations with their false gods and, in spite of that goodness, these descendants of Abraham turned away from God and embraced the idols of the heathen nations. The pagans were more faithful to their false gods than Israel was to the One True God.

Part of the reason why pagans were more faithful to their gods than Israel was to YHWH is that the primitive pagan religions were rooted in beliefs that were closely aligned with the

fallen human nature and appealed to what we might call the “animalistic” drives such a sexual gratification, the assertion of dominance over others, and self-preservation which fuels the basic competitive drive that pushes people toward selfishness. These drives were distinctive and descriptive of Baal worship. On the other hand, God was calling people to a higher and more noble way of living that was counter intuitive to basic survival drives. This was a higher standard than the fallen-human-nature drives which evolved from mankind attempting to operate apart from meaningful interactions with God. Essentially, the pagan life style was a better fit to the fallen human nature than the behavior that God wanted His people to follow.

We see this even today when people are basically ignorant of anything spiritual and they are living their lives by doing what come “naturally.” If someone hits you, you hit them back and hit them harder. If you see something you want, take it but don’t get caught. If you want to “feel good,” take a drug that produces a euphoric state without any concern about what might result from such actions. If someone insults you, shoot them or stab them or figure out some other way to establish dominance. Some of these behaviors are occasionally seen in people who are associated with churches and it used to be said that they were backsliding when these behaviors happened. It is likely that such associations with churches were and are simply results of attempts to gain an advantage in the communities in which they lived which brings us back to the animalistic drives of doing “whatever is necessary” to establish dominance. During the last several decades, we have seen a sharp decrease in the percentage of people in our nation who say they are associated with churches. One reason for such a decline is that in the present-day culture, being a “church-member” is no longer thought to provide any advantage that might help a person’s career or ambitions.

We could make the case for our nation that we are becoming more and more like the situation in Israel and Judah prior to the destruction of Israel by Assyria and the Babylonian exile period for Judah. A major difference is that we (in our sophistication) do not actually have carved idols in our homes or public places, however, many are bowing down (worshiping) to different and strange philosophies and world views as a matter of survival and to avoid being canceled. As a result, the behavior of many people in “Christian nations” (today) is that such “Christians” will readily abandon the principles of Godliness and adopt behaviors that are totally antithetical to Christian values.

God gave Jeremiah an example of just how inane the people of Israel had become that involved choosing between fresh, clean water and stagnant water that might be contaminated. They had been given the best situation and they disregarded what was available by God’s grace and chose to do things like the worst examples of human behavior (paganism).

Just as the example of substituting a cracked pot to hold water rather than getting fresh water from a fresh free-flowing stream would make us think that the person who would do so might just be foolish, even so we ought to think that a person or a nation that would abandon the way of the Lord for the way of the world is also foolish.

John Gill’s commentary states that the first sin is “forsaking God” and the second is “having dug their own cisterns.” They abandoned the truth of God and substituted the philosophies of man resulting in being weakened and fell prey to the surrounding nations. We, as a nation, have abandoned our Christian heritage and are drinking polluted water of our own making (double entendre) or we have adopted Eastern religions or Islam or some other polluted foolishness such as is evident today in our nation. There is a principle that people come under the rule of those whose gods they serve. This is what happened to both Israel and Judah and, as they say, “history repeats itself.”