

FAILING TO FOLLOW THE FACTS

We are a lot smarter than we act. We certainly know more than we practice. We tend to think that more education and knowledge and a clearer picture of God's will for our lives would make us better people and give us more prosperity. However, the problems we have are mainly due to failure to follow what we already know rather than something that we are missing because of lack of understanding of a difficult concept or some passage of scripture. Someone once said, "I am not as concerned about the parts of the Bible that I don't understand as I am about the parts I do understand and have difficulty practicing."

Judah could not use something such as "ignorance of what God requires" as an excuse for their unfaithfulness - they knew what the Scriptures said. They even had teachings from "conventional wisdom" that condemned what they were doing. In addition to all that, they knew what had happened to others (the Northern Kingdom of Israel) when they abandoned God. On top of all this, things were not going very well for them - natural disasters, political unrest, significant influence from foreign nations - all of which were signs that they had failed to be faithful to God (See Deut Ch. 28)

This is so similarly parallel to our times. There is probably more preaching and Bible study going on in our nation than in all the rest of the world combined. We have entire TV channels that have preaching day and night. Bibles and study helps are readily available. There are multiple churches in our cities and the list goes on and on. We have readily available histories of all the fallen empires and the reasons for their demise and we know (from conventional) wisdom that those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. After all, if we continue to do what we have been doing, then we should not be surprised to keep getting the same results. We see the warning signs of natural disasters and terrorist attacks and for a brief moment our thoughts turn to God and spiritual matters but it is all too brief. We fail to follow the facts.

Jer 3:1-2 "If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and marries another man, should he return to her again? Would not the land be completely defiled? But you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers— would you now return to me?" declares the LORD. "Look up to the barren heights and see. Is there any place where you have not been ravished? By the roadside you sat waiting for lovers, sat like a nomad in the desert. You have defiled the land with your prostitution and wickedness.

Chapter three starts with a quote from their own conventional wisdom regarding the relationship in families who experience divorce because of unfaithfulness. God, through Jeremiah is calling attention to the fact that they knew what they were doing (in going after Baal worship) was wrong. It was not out of ignorance. It was certainly stupid but it was not from ignorance. They started out drifting into sin, but eventually came to the point of pursing opportunities to sin. The nature of sinfulness is that it always goes from bad to worse and people eventually cast off all restraint. The result is pollution and defilement of the "land" or the "people who live in the land" where the lack of restraint is rampant.

God is not bound by "conventional wisdom" and in His mercy, He took steps to bring the people back to Himself. We see what God did to get their attention, what their response was and the condemnation they pronounced upon themselves.

Jer 3: 3-5 "Therefore the showers have been withheld, and no spring rains have fallen. Yet you have the brazen look of a prostitute; you refuse to blush with shame. Have you not just called to me: 'My Father, my friend from my youth, will you always be angry? Will your wrath continue forever?' This is how you talk, but you do all the evil you can."

What God did: Stopped the rain

Judah's Response: Defiance (brazen attitude to continue what they were doing) and quenching

of their conscience.

Self Judgement: They called to God, acknowledging Him as Father and friend. They admitted they realized He was angry with them and yet they just requested relief and did not pursue obedience. This should remind us of the question Jesus asked, “Why do you call me Lord and do not the things I tell you to do?” (Luke 6:46)

During the past several years many so-called natural disasters and terrorist’s acts have rocked our nation. Yet no one is turning to God to ask why He is angry with us. We have gone so far in “casting off restraint” that we hardly realize that God is trying to get our attention.

Even their own historical information pointed to what could be expected if they continued down the path they were going.

Jer 3:6 -10 During the reign of King Josiah, the LORD said to me, "Have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there.

I thought that after she had done all this she would return to me but she did not, and her unfaithful sister Judah saw it. I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery. Because Israel’s immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood. In spite of all this, her unfaithful sister Judah did not return to me with all her heart, but only in pretense," declares the LORD.

If we fail to learn the lessons from the past, then we will repeat what has happen to others. Many of God’s prophets have all but become silent since the people have refused to listen. Though many “judgements” are available for all to see and from which to learn, yet people do not genuinely repent. For example: What happened after the disaster of 9-11? There were prayer meetings, special services, religious leader were interviewed, churches sent counselors to New York to help people cope with the situation, and other things were started. People started going to church who had not been in ages. Where are we now? Back to where we started or maybe even worse than we were. Dare we call what happened “pretense?”

Jer 3:11-13 The LORD said to me, "Faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah. Go, proclaim this message toward the north: "'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD, 'I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful,' declares the LORD, 'I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your guilt— you have rebelled against the LORD your God, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me,'" declares the LORD.

God’s judgement had already fallen upon the Northern Kingdom. It had been more wicked than Judah and Assyria had conquered them and the people carried away as captives. Judah had seen this but failed to learn from it. They instead sinned more than Israel did. We can tell that God’s judgement against His people was redemptive since He then called them back to Himself. The criteria was confession of sin and repentance (return).

The prophetic message and call to repent has gone out to our nation for decades. I can remember that some 40 years ago preachers were saying “If God does not judge America, then He will need to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah. I thought that may have been somewhat of an exaggeration then, but I no longer think it is an overstatement.

Jer 3:14-18 (NIV) "Return, faithless people," declares the LORD, "for I am your husband. I will choose you— one from a town and two from a clan— and bring you to Zion. Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the LORD, "men will no longer say, ‘The ark of the covenant of the LORD.’ It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made. At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the LORD, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the LORD. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts. In those days the house of Judah will join the house of Israel, and together they will come from a northern land to the land I gave your forefathers as an inheritance.

Jer 3:14-18 (YLT) Turn back, O backsliding sons, An affirmation of Jehovah. For I have ruled over you, And taken you one of a city, and two of a family, And have brought you to Zion, And I have given to you shepherds According to Mine own heart, And they have fed you with knowledge and understanding. And it hath come to pass, when ye are multiplied, And have been fruitful in the land, In those days—an affirmation of Jehovah, They say not any more, 'The ark of the covenant of Jehovah,' Nor doth it go up on the heart, Nor do they remember concerning it, Nor do they inspect, nor is it made again. At that time they cry to Jerusalem, 'O throne of Jehovah,' And gathered unto her hath been all the nations, For the name of Jehovah, to Jerusalem, Nor do they go any more after the stubbornness of their evil heart. In those days do the house of Judah Go unto the house of Israel, And they come together from the land of the south, unto the land That I caused your fathers to inherit.

Most translations present verses 14-18 as a future happening. Young's Literal Translation presents this a "past" and "present in the time of Jeremiah" account and is, therefore, not a prophecy of future events but is simply part of the on-going indictment of God against the faithless people of Judah and Israel. The verbs in the Hebrew are "perfect" tense which is used with that which has already happened.

The call to return comes back as a refrain. God reminded them that He had chosen them and He had brought to Zion. He had provided "shepherding" according to His own heart. However, when they were multiplied and increased, they forgot about the fact that God was dwelling with them (as evidenced by the Ark of the Covenant) and they did not even mention it or do anything with it. Jerusalem was known as the "throne of Jehovah" and nations did come there for advice and favor. That was no longer the case but Judah had gone the way of Israel (Northern Kingdom) because of the stubbornness of their evil hearts.

Jer 3:20-21 But like a woman unfaithful to her husband, so you have been unfaithful to me, O house of Israel," declares the LORD. A cry is heard on the barren heights, the weeping and pleading of the people of Israel, because they have perverted their ways and have forgotten the LORD their God.

The indictment continues in verse 20 and it appears that there is a realization that something is very wrong with their nation. The people, however, are lamenting and crying out on the "high places" or "barren heights" where they worshiped their idols thinking they could save them.

Jer 3:22-25 "Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding." "Yes, we will come to you, for you are the LORD our God. Surely the idolatrous commotion on the hills and mountains is a deception; surely in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. From our youth shameful gods have consumed the fruits of our fathers' labor—their flocks and herds, their sons and daughters. Let us lie down in our shame, and let our disgrace cover us. We have sinned against the LORD our God, both we and our fathers; from our youth till this day we have not obeyed the LORD our God."

The third call to return is a call to recognize the folly of former ways and, in humility, to repent realizing that there is no salvation apart from God's own provision. After the third call, apparently, there is a breakthrough and the people agree to repent. It is when we finally realize that everything that is not of God is a deception and has no power to save that true repentance happens. It is when we are convicted of our sin and see that we have been disobedient to God and turn to Him in faith that salvation can result.