

## PERSONAL

### Jeremiah 7:1-15

Why do we do what we do? What is the motive behind the actions we take? If you are an observer of people, then it doesn't take very long to realize that most people are influenced by the outward show of things or appearances. On TV we have 24-7 news programming that is biased by political ideology and we have this and other programming sponsored by products and services with slick advertising and promotions which are all designed to create a specific impression. I guess that all of us are influenced to some extent by concerns about our own appearance and how we come across to others. We certainly dress differently when we go shopping compared to what we wear to work in the garden. Some of this concern about appearance is simply trying to avoid drawing attention to ourselves and to conform to the norms of the culture. (This might be called practicing good etiquette or showing respect for others.) In some instances, some people may be trying to deceive others by promoting a false appearance in order to gain some advantage for themselves. A third possibility is that we can deceive ourselves by thinking that by deliberately going through the motions of behaving in a certain way causes us to be different from whom (or what) we actually are. It is difficult to think of a situation where people do this and deceive themselves outside of the context of religion. We would not fool ourselves into thinking that we are graduates of Harvard by speaking with a Boston accent, getting a job in investment banking and attending the alumni functions of Harvard graduates. However, there are many people who think that going to church or just being a member of "the church" will result in their salvation even though they have not been born again.

God looks at the heart or the intent of our thoughts, words or deeds. We should be asking ourselves such questions as "Do I do *what I do* for the praise of men or to be pleasing to God? The thoughts and intents of our heart are difficult to separate and it is only by the Word of God that we can possibly tell the difference. It was for this reason God sent His word to the people of Judah, to the religious and governmental leaders. God used such men as Jeremiah as His spokesmen and these great prophets proclaimed His word at great personal costs. Jeremiah's message was about judgment on a nation that not only had forgotten God but had also turned to idols. God offered to receive them back but He also warned that their continuing in the way they were going would result in His rejection of them.

#### Listen – 7:1-2

<sup>1</sup> The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, <sup>2</sup> "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!'" Jeremiah 7:1-2 (NASB95)

Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry during the reign of Josiah in Judah. Josiah initiated many reforms throughout the nation and worship in the temple had been restored. There was a significant turnaround in the nation during the time Josiah was king. Josiah was killed in battle with Egypt and Josiah's son (Jehoiakim) was installed as king of Judah by pharaoh; however, the nation was really under the control of the Egyptians.

The depth of devotion to worship of Jehovah did not extend to those in Josiah's family. During the reign of Jehoiakim the emphasis on following the Scriptures and worshiping only in the temple disappeared and the Jews quickly reverted to idolatry and pagan worship practices which were characteristic of the nation before Josiah's time. As a result of Josiah's reforms, the temple had taken on a central position in the life of the Jews. Many continued to go to the temple and would practice the rituals of worship in the temple, but it was just a religious routine

they did. There was not any correlation or impact of their worship of Jehovah and obedience to what He had commanded them to do.

The people had bought into the idea that all they needed to do to be right with God was to do something religious at appropriate intervals. Apparently, that same misguided reliance on ritual or attendance is still prevalent today. Many people seem to believe that God is only interested in their attending Mass every week, going to confession once a month, attending church every so often, putting some money in the offering plate, participating in the Lord's Supper at least once a year (or for some, every week), praying before meals or before going to bed at night, reading a certain number of Bible verses every day, giving an invitation at the end of each worship service, etc.

The messages Jeremiah delivered were not his ideas and did not originate with him, but were God's words. Notice that this message was for a specific group of people. Not only did God tell Jeremiah what to say, but He also told him where to say it. By standing in the temple gate, people could not help but hear the message God had for them. God sent the message to those that came to worship in the Temple rather than to people who were worshiping false gods and idols on the hilltops. Some scholars think that the occasion for this particular message was during one of the three annual celebrations that required people from all over Judah to come to Jerusalem so that more people could hear the message.

The call to repent goes first to those who profess to know God. Judgment begins with God's people. "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begins with us, what shall the end be of them who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17)

### Correct – 7:3-8

<sup>3</sup>Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. <sup>4</sup>"Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.' <sup>5</sup>"For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor, <sup>6</sup>if 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, <sup>7</sup>then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever <sup>8</sup>"Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail." Jeremiah 7:3-8 (NASB95)

God is identified here as the "Lord of the armies of heaven" (Lord of hosts). By this identification, He makes it known that He is in charge of a vast power network and, therefore, He is capable of bringing about whatever He wants to do. He is also specifically identified as the "God of Israel." Here we see that this same Almighty God of the universe had taken a personal interest in a tiny, seemingly insignificant nation on planet earth. God called for action: "Amend your ways and your doings!" To whom was God talking? The religious people! Time after time we see the call of God going out to those who are His rather than the heathen. If God could just get the Christians to do what they should do and go where they should go and teach what they should teach, then the problem of the heathen and the unbelievers would find a solution.

God's promise to Israel was if they amended their ways, He would cause them to "dwell in this place." The meaning of this promise has several interpretations. First, and most obvious, would be that the impending disaster of the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity would **not** happen. Instead, they would continue to occupy the land of Israel. An alternate interpretation would be that "this place" referred to the Temple and that the relationship between God and Judah would be such as David described in Psalms 23 – "and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord, forever." There is another translation of the Hebrew words that says, "I (meaning God) will dwell in this place." In other words, in response to the repentance of the people, God

would manifest Himself to them as in the time of the dedication of the temple when the cloud filled the temple. Is this not what God tells us today? If we will surrender to Him and receive Him, then He will come and indwell our own temples (our bodies). (John 14:23)

Jeremiah warned the people to **not** put their trust in anything other than the truth as revealed in the word of God. Some were trusting in the fact that the temple was there in Jerusalem; therefore, no real danger could befall them. God was trying to tell them that the building was not the “Temple of the Lord” unless the Lord was in the Temple. As Christians we need to hear this same message. Just saying that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit does not make it so – it is the indwelling presence of God through His Spirit that makes it true.

God left no doubt as to what "amend your ways" was all about. He spelled out in specific terms what He expects from His people in their relationship with each other. This kind of relationship with our fellow man can happen only when people are in right relationship with God. Notice in verse five the adjectives used with the idea of “amend your ways” and “do justice.” In various translations we might see such descriptions as “thoroughly” or “truly” or “really” to communicate that God was not just talking about “appearance” or something that was superficial.

### Stop – 7:9-11

<sup>9</sup> “Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, <sup>10</sup> then 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? <sup>11</sup> “Has 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. Jeremiah 7:9-11 (NASB95)

These people were guilty of practicing every sin prohibited by the Ten Commandments and then they would come into the Temple and expect that because they practiced certain religious exercises that everything would be OK. There are people today who think because they go to church on Sunday that everything is OK between them and God. There are others who believe that if they make it church at Christmas, Easter and other special occasions that everything is OK between them and God. Still others think that just having their names on a membership role of a church makes everything OK. Why is this happening? Because many in the pulpits of our churches are preaching an “easy believism” that has no repentance (turning from sin) and no turning from trusting in ourselves and in our own strength to trusting in God.

Any relationship with God that does not have Him as Lord is an **empty** relationship. Many people want a relationship with God in which He is Lord in name but not in deed. That may be satisfying to man but, I can assure you God does not want any part of that.

Notice what the people said (or perhaps just thought). “Since the Temple is here and we have offered our sacrifices, then we will be able to do anything we wish and the sins will not be held against us.” What would be the equivalent or comparable thought among those who are involved in the church today? It might be a thought something like the following: “Since we believe that the Bible teaches ‘once saved, always saved,’ then I can sin all I want to and I will still go to heaven when I die.” Such thinking would be like the person who would pray, “Lord, forgive me for this sin I’m about to commit.” Let me assure you, that such thinking is NOT based on faith, it is simply presumption.

In Psalm 19:13, David prayed the following: “Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous *sins*; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.” Willful (presumptuous) sins are those things we do with the full knowledge of its violation of God’s will but we do so on the basis that we “know that we can get

forgiveness for it.” These are termed presumptuous because they “presume” upon God’s grace. Such sins may be hidden or out in the open. The word translated “willful” in the NIV and “presumptuous” in the KJV is usually translated as “proud.” We should never presume on the goodness and grace of God treating it as something we deserve (thinking we deserve something is sure evidence of pride).

The consequence of sin that is not restrained is that we end up being controlled and dominated by sin. This is exactly what God warned Cain about in Genesis 4:7 “If you do well, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.” The lessons have been there for them and for us to learn since the time of Genesis.

### Repeated – 7:12-15

<sup>12</sup> “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. <sup>13</sup> “And 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, <sup>14</sup> therefore, 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. <sup>15</sup> “I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim. Jeremiah 7:12-15 (NASB95)

The error of such thinking could be plainly seen by the Jews in the history of their own nation. Just look at Shiloh: the Ark of the Covenant was there and the Tabernacle, but the place was overrun and the Ark captured by the Philistines because of the sins of the people. God warned them through Jeremiah that the same thing would happen to Jerusalem.

What does all this say to us as Christians? If we continue to turn away from God, then there is a price to pay. On the other hand, if we “amend our ways” then God has great blessings for us. The church needs to learn lessons from history and not repeat the errors of others who have drifted or run away from God.

While the emphasis and the message of these first fifteen verses of this seventh chapter of Jeremiah’s prophecy give us a lot to think about, it would be inappropriate to stop here without considering that these verses provide the background of what was to follow starting in verse sixteen. The conclusion of the situation is one of the more sobering statements in Scripture in which God forbid Jeremiah to pray for the people. After Jeremiah had issued the call to Judah to repent, that was all he was to do. God forbid him to even pray for Judah. Instead, Jeremiah was told to observe what was happening. Entire families were involved in going after other gods. The repeated calls for repentance went unheeded and even the children were being misled to worship false gods. If our children are brought up under pagan or mere secular influence, then it will be difficult for real repentance to occur.

The basic problem of the people was rebellion against the authority of God. It was not ignorance of God. Rebellion does not hurt God it hurt those who rebel. The response of God to rebellion and refusal to repent is that judgement will come and it will affect everything – the people and the physical world they inhabit.