

The Folly of Refusing God

Jeremiah 8

Jeremiah 8:1-3 - *“At that time,” says the Lord, “they shall 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, out of their graves.² They shall spread them before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and which they have served and after which they have walked, which they have sought and which they have worshiped. They shall not be gathered nor buried; they shall be like refuse on the face of the earth. ³ Then death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of those who remain of this evil family, who remain in all the places where I have driven them,” says the Lord of hosts.”*

Background Notes

In Jeremiah 7 we discussed the well-known Temple Sermon. Most Bibles indicate that this sermon continued through the first three verses of chapter 8. (Remember, there were no chapter and verse divisions in the book of Jeremiah when it was originally written!)

In these three verses, the word of the Lord through Jeremiah predicted that when the Babylonians invaded Judah, they would desecrate the graves of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, including the kings, and princes, and priests, and prophets. Digging up the graves and exposing the bones of the dead was considered to be the ultimate insult. It was a mark of extreme contempt for the people that had been conquered.

Notice the irony in verse 2, when the Lord said that the bones from the desecrated graves would be spread out before the sun and moon and stars - the very astral bodies that the people of Judah had worshiped as part of their idolatry. A lot of help those false “gods” would provide them! And how true that is today. The false gods that people worship in this life - like power, success, pleasure, or material things - mock them in death.

After the fall of Judah, conditions would be so bad that the people would want to die rather than live. Sadly, these disastrous conditions could have been prevented - but Judah had deliberately chosen to turn away from the Lord. The people had deliberately refused to receive the help that God offered them.

In the rest of the chapter 8 through chapter 10, Jeremiah gave several more prophecies. They were probably given around the same time as the Temple Sermon in 609 BC, during the early months of King Jehoiachin’s reign.

Doctrinal Points

1. Judgment follows a refusal to turn back to the Lord.

Jeremiah 8:4-12 - *“Moreover you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord: “Will they fall and not rise? Will one turn away and not return? ⁵ Why has this people slidden back, Jerusalem, in a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit; they refuse to return.*

⁶ I listened and heard, but they do not speak aright. No man repented of his wickedness, saying, ‘What have I done?’ Everyone turned to his own course, as the horse rushes into the battle. ⁷ “Even the stork in the heavens knows her appointed times; and the turtle dove, the swift, and the swallow observe the time of their coming. But My people do not know the judgment of the Lord.

⁸ “How can you say, ‘We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us’? Look, the false pen of the scribe certainly works falsehood. ⁹ The wise men are ashamed. They are dismayed and taken. Behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord, so what wisdom do they have?

¹⁰ Therefore I will give their wives to others, and their fields to those who will inherit them, because from the least even to the greatest everyone is given to covetousness. From the prophet even to the priest everyone deals falsely. ¹¹ For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ when there is no peace.

¹² Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, nor did they know how to blush. Therefore, they shall fall among those who fall.; In the time of their punishment they shall be cast down,” says the Lord.

In these verses, the people of Judah were denounced for their refusal to turn back to the Lord: *“Why has this people slid back, Jerusalem, in a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return” (v5).*

The Lord said that their refusal to turn back was unnatural. Isn't it natural to get back up if you slip and fall? (v4)? But Judah stubbornly refused to repent and come back to the Lord. They rushed on in sin, were like a horse rushing headlong into battle (v6). Even migratory birds instinctively know when it's time to return - but not Judah!

The people claimed to be wise and that they knew the word of the Lord, but God said that they couldn't possibly be wise because they had rejected His Word (v7-9). Therefore, judgment would follow. Even though the false prophets continued to preach “peace, peace!” there would be no peace (v11). The people would lose their possessions and their families (v10).

Judah had backslidden so badly that the leaders and people were not even ashamed of their ungodly and immoral ways (v12). Back in chapter 6 we mentioned how much these verses describe our own nation today. We no longer blush at open sins – sins that were once not even mentioned in public! Our nation has deliberately turned far from God and His Word, and judgment follows a refusal to return.

2. Judgment follows a refusal to produce fruit for the Lord.

Jeremiah 8: 13-17 - *"I will surely consume them," says the Lord. "No grapes shall be on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree. The leaf shall fade, and the things I have given them shall pass away from them."*

¹⁴ *"Why do we sit still? Assemble yourselves, and let us enter the fortified cities, and let us be silent there. For the Lord our God has put us to silence and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against the Lord.*

¹⁵ *"We looked for peace, but no good came; for a time of health, and there was trouble!*

¹⁶ *The snorting of His horses was heard from Dan. The whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of His strong ones, for they have come and devoured the land and all that is in it, the city and those who dwell in it." ¹⁷ "For behold, I will send serpents among you - vipers that cannot be charmed, and they shall bite you," says the Lord."*

The Lord had expected His people to produce the spiritual fruit of righteousness. But He found no fruit - so they would be taken away from the Land. They would be unable to produce fruit, because they had reached the point of no return.

Now they would have to drink the bitter and poisoned water of God's judgment because they had foolishly believed the message of peace given by the false prophets (v14-15). Already the sounds of the advancing Babylonian army could be heard from the city of Dan in the far north (v16). The people would run to the fortified cities in vain hopes of protection. Nebuchadnezzar and His forces would be like poisonous snakes that could not be charmed (v17). Judgment follows a refusal to produce fruit.

As God's people today, are we producing spiritual fruit God expects? Read John 15. This important chapter teaches us that if we are connected "in the Vine" of Christ, but not producing much fruit, the Lord must "prune" us to help us produce more good fruit. Like a good father, He must point out areas of sin in our lives - and discipline us. The pruning process is not very pleasant, especially if we refuse to bear fruit, like the people of Judah refused to bear fruit. Judgment follows a refusal to produce fruit.

3. Judgment follows a refusal to accept healing from the Lord.

Jeremiah 8:18-22 - *"I would comfort myself in sorrow; my heart is faint in me. ¹⁹ Listen! The voice, the cry of the daughter of my people from a far country: "Is not the Lord in Zion? Is not her King in her?"*

"Why have they provoked Me to anger with their carved images - with foreign idols?"

²⁰ *"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!"*

²¹ *For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt. I am mourning. Astonishment has taken hold of me. ²² Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no recovery for the health of the daughter of my people?"*

These are probably the saddest verses of the chapter. Jeremiah was speaking prophetically for the nation, of the time when they would finally realize their chances for healing and restoration were gone. Because of their sin, they were taken away as captives – taken from Zion (Jerusalem) to a distant land (v18-19).

Jeremiah was distraught. He was broken up over the fact that Judah had deliberately refused her many chances to return to the Lord. Now it was too late! The summer and the harvest time was over, and Judah could not be saved from judgment (v20-21).

How sad! Judah was like a terminally ill person who refuses treatment. The healing “balm of Gilead” was a medicinal resin, obtained from trees that grew in the land of Gilead. Jeremiah’s point was that Gilead was only a short distance away - just across the Jordan River. Why would a sick person refuse help and healing when it was so near? And yet the people of Judah were essentially doing exactly that when they refused to turn back to the Lord. Judgment must follow this refusal to accept God’s offer of healing.

Today God offers healing from the sickness of sin through Jesus Christ the Savior - the true Balm of Gilead. But people today refuse to accept healing. They deliberately turn away from the Son of God - so judgment must follow. The Lord Jesus said, *“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36).*

Judgment follows a refusal to accept healing.

Practical Application

Get saved before the harvest!

This is what the people of Judah said when they realized that it was too late to be saved from the coming judgment. And that is what unbelievers will say in the future when they realize it is too late to be saved from the consequences of sin and the judgment of God.

In Matthew 3:12, John the Baptist referred to the time of judgment at our Lord’s second coming: *“His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, gathering His wheat into the barn, but burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”*

Which category are you in? Are you wheat? - or chaff? Life is short. The day of God’s grace will not last forever. How tragic to have to say in the end, *“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!”*

Get saved before the harvest!