

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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Jeremiah's America - # 13

SUBJECT: REBELLION AGAINST GOD

TITLE: THEY WILL NOT OBEY

TEXT: JEREMIAH 18:7-17

INTRODUCTION. The title of the program caught my attention and I clicked back and forth between whatever I was watching and the Fox News Network for about an hour. It was Christmas day, 2005, by the way. What was the title that caught my attention? I can assure you it was not one of those misleading programs on the History Channel or the Discovery Channel: you know, "The Real Jesus"; or "The Real Flood"; or something like that. The program was DO WE NEED GOD?, or maybe the question was, "Do we need to believe in God?" One man seemed to be a Hindu and he gave his answers. The Jew declared that the problem with religions came about centuries ago when some Christians began declaring that one had to go to God through Jesus Christ, whereas Jews believe you have to earn your way through good works. He said that Christianity became exclusive rather than inclusive because of this. I know they must have had a Muslim on there but I did not see him if they did. No one asked about how Jews feel about Christian evangelism in Israel!

Then the interviewer, I believe it was Loren Green, talked with a former astronaut who said that he became spiritual when he was three years old. After a few minutes of New Age gibberish, the interviewer asked, "You believe nature is god, don't you?" He said, and I am paraphrasing him, "Yes, nature is god. And I believe I am god." This proves that neither Eastern Mysticism nor New Age mysticism is dead! Perhaps the most disturbing response came from the pastor of Riverside Church in New York. He was introduced as pastor of a multiracial, multi-cultural church. The pastor is an African-American, and somehow, I expected more of him when he began to speak, but as he responded to questions, he reminded me of those prophets of Jeremiah's day who prophesied lies to the people. For example, he was asked, "Do you believe the Bible is inerrant?" He says that it is not inerrant, it is a living Bible (meaning that it changes with the times). When asked if Jesus is the only way to heaven, he responded, "When God starts passing our Oscars in heaven, he is going to invite people from other companies to step up and receive their rewards."

Jeremiah condemned lying prophets. Rather, God condemned them - Jeremiah just delivered God's word. As I have stressed a number of times in this series, America is reflected in the Book of Jeremiah in a shocking way. Perhaps nothing underscores this any more graphically than the lying preachers who deny the Trinity, the virgin birth, the sinless character of Jesus, the vicarious death of our Savior, the Resurrection, inerrancy of the Word, or the Scripture that states so unequivocally that there is no other name known among man whereby we must be saved, other than Jesus.

Contrast this world-view with that of perhaps the greatest American ever, George Washington. God used General George Washington, perhaps more than any other single person to set this country free and to grant you and me the freedom guaranteed by our constitution, including those precious amendments. Dutch Shoffner forwarded this quote from the Patriot Quote daily quote:

"I have often expressed my sentiments, that every man, conducting himself as a good citizen, and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshiping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience" (-- George Washington (letter to the General Committee of the United Baptist Churches in Virginia, May 1789).

I. THE PEOPLE SAID, "WE WILL NOT OBEY", JEREMIAH. 18:7-18.

A. God Is Totally Justified In Whatever Action He Takes.

1. People ask why bad things happen to good people.

Years ago a deacon asked me to read a book written by a Jewish Rabbi, WHY BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE. It was a popular book and the author is still interviewed on TV today following one catastrophe or another. The deacon was concerned about a number of things he had read and asked me to read it and make notes in the margin when I saw something that was not scriptural. There were a lot of notes. When I returned it to the deacon he read my notes and took the book out and burned it. How should we answer the question, Why do bad things happen to good people? Very simply, they don't! There aren't any. I may have just labeled myself a right-wing fundamentalist, but that is the answer. The Bible is very clear, there is none good but God. The Bible is also clear about something else: all suffering and death entered the human experience because of sin. Now, the Lord did not ordain you to assign the sin to each individual. Only He knows for sure. However, if a person drinks alcohol and becomes an alcoholic you are safe in associating the sin with the suffering. If a person chooses to become promiscuous and contracts HIV or some other STD, you know that there is a strong possibility that you know what sin caused the suffering. However, if a child develops a rare form of Leukemia, you had better not speculate about sin. Sin is responsible for suffering, but you have not been ordained to assign guilt.

2. God exercised His sovereignty in His actions toward Israel.

The Lord sent Jeremiah with a message that was designed to turn Israel back to Him. He had been longsuffering in dealing with them, but the time for repentance was running out. Listen to His options:

"At one moment I might announce concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will uproot, tear down, and destroy it. However, *if that nation I have made an announcement about, turns from its evil, I will not bring the disaster on it I had*

planned. At another time I announce that I will build and plant a nation or a kingdom” (Jer. 18:7-9).

The first name in the Bible for God is the word Elohim, a word that denotes power - He had the power to create all things. Another word for God is Adonai, a word which denotes sovereignty - He has the sovereign right to reign over all He has created. As the Sovereign Lord, He may choose to plant a nation, as He had chosen Israel and planted her in the Land Flowing with Milk and Honey. He may choose to bless that nation. Or, He may decide to judge that nation:

*“However, if it does what is evil in My sight by not listening to My voice, I will not bring the good I had said I would do to it. So now, say to the men of Judah and to the residents of Jerusalem: **This is what the Lord says: I am about to bring harm to you and make plans against you. Turn now, each from your evil way, and correct your ways and your deeds**” (18:10-11) .*

What can be plainer that? If the people of Judah repent and return to the Lord He will establish them as a nation. He will bless them and not punish them. If they refuse to return to Him, He will not spare them. The choice is His of course, but God pleads with them, “Turn now, each from your evil way, and correct your ways and your deeds.” Knowing the history of God’s dealings with Israel you would think they would have to be absolute fools to persist in their rebellion. Before you judge those ancient Israelites too severely, stop and take a look at America today. America is mirrored in the Book of Jeremiah. What sins had they committed that America is not committing today. On March, 23, 2005), some judges and doctors made a commitment to honor the request of Michael Shiavo to kill his wife - and the polls showed that the majority of Americans agree with what they are doing. Those who were trying to save her life were being ridiculed as right-wing fundamentalists. One man called Rush Limbaugh and charged that those who are trying to save Terri’s life are pandering to Protestant Christians - even though Terri and her family are Catholics! Moving out from this one case, it seems obvious that the ACLU, liberal educators and politicians are joined by people in the news media and the entertainment industry in an effort to force Christians out of the public arena and back into their homes and church buildings.

B. Now, Let’s See Israel’s Response to the Lord, 18:12.

*“But they will say: It’s hopeless. **We will continue to follow our plans, and each of us will continue to act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.**”*

Keil and Delitzsch points out that Jeremiah does not say, “they said,” but “they say.” The point is that these people were currently saying that they would continue to refuse to obey the Lord. Their history reveals that they had said the same thing in the past, and they knew the consequences of their stubborn rebellion. Nevertheless, they continue to say, we will not obey the Lord. They, by their actions and words were saying, “We will continue to follow our plans.”

Outspoken, militant, anti-Christians are doing everything they can to make America a secular

society. They are growing more bold with each passing year in their hostility toward Jesus Christ. They are not criticizing Islam, a religion of blood and violence, and they are not condemning New Age religions, Budhaism, or animism - just Christianity. These secularists are shouting, "We will not listen to you; we will follow our own plan."

The people of Judah declare, "Each of us will continue to act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart." Again, Keil Delitzsch points out that Jeremiah "makes them condemn themselves out of their own mouth" (Is. 28:15; 30:10ff). Now, do you remember the difference between the word sin and the word transgression? Of which are they guilty? They are not simply missing the mark by accident or through ignorance. These people are defiantly stepping across the line with their eyes wide open. "We will continue to follow our plans, and each of us will continue to act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart."

I do not know when I have seen this expressed more brazenly, or more insolently than all those people who listened to all the reasons Terri Schiavo should have been given an opportunity to live, and then arrogantly defended Michael Shiavo's rights as her husband to have the feeding tubes removed. Here is a man who abandoned Terri as his wife, took up with another woman, with whom he has two children, and wanted nothing more than to see his legal wife dead. A nurse who took care of Terri from 1995-1998, has stated that Michael would walk up to the nurses desk and ask about her, and then say, "When is that B- - - going to die?"

Terri's parents wanted only to take care for her. They asked Michael to simply go his own way and let them assume responsibility for her. Michael's attorney, paid from the medical settlement Terri received, carried on a vicious crusade to have Terri killed. Apparently, there was money for her care until Michael spent it on lawyers. If we could state this the way Jeremiah did, they were saying, "No matter what Terri's family says, no matter what Christians are saying, no matter what her church says, no matter what God says, "We will continue to follow our plans, and each of us will continue to act **according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.**" Murder is evil, whether murder by the judge, attorney, doctor, or a man who claims to love his wife while living with another woman, it is still evil. Make no mistake about this one point: Michael Shiavo was not just missing the mark here, he was crossing the line with his eyes wide open. Here is the shocker: as we have seen, polls showed that over half the people in America supported him. Have we become a culture of death? Millions of abortions would suggest that this is the case. Rush Limbaugh states that this is the attitude of the Baby Boomers, of whom he is one, who are rightly called the "me generation." He says they put themselves first and when they see a case like this they are thinking ahead to the time when they may have to choose between caring for their parents or letting them die. Some are already calling the Terri Shiavo case the Roe v. Wade of euthanasia. I just thank the Lord the so many Christians still place value on human life. By the way, many who fought for and prayed for Terri Shiavo are also Baby Boomers.

Many in America fight for the right to kill unborn babies, and to date, since Roe v. Wade we have slaughtered more than twice as many human beings as Hitler butchered in German, Poland, and other countries. Leaders pander to liberals and pass laws to redefine marriage to include unions between

two people of the same sex. They are crusading for homosexual rights. The sad thing is that even though Christians are leading the fight against these evils, many of those who are crusading for these sins profess to be Christians.

Judah could run out a long line of prophets who preached what they wanted to hear. Believe me, we have our share of false prophets today. One denomination is running television spots announcing that they opened the door to blacks before some other denominations, and now they are opening the door to homosexuals. I strongly oppose the reference to African-Americans as somehow in the same boat with homosexuals. I wonder how long it has been since these people have taken a serious look at the Word of God! What God condemns, they insist that they welcome into His church. And make no mistake about it, these people are not demanding that these people repent, they are inviting them to bring those ungodly, immoral relationships into the church. America is continuing to act according to the stubbornness of her own heart.

C. God Points Out the Extent of Judah's Guilt and the Consequences of It, Jer. 18:13-17.

*“Therefore, this is what the Lord says: Ask among the nations, Who has heard things Like these? **Virgin Israel has done a most terrible thing..... Yet My people have forgotten Me.** They burn incense to false idols that make them stumble in their ways— in the ancient roads— to walk on new paths, not the highway. They have made their land a horror, a perpetual object of scorn; everyone who passes by it will be horrified and shake his head. **I will scatter them** before the enemy like the east wind. **I will show them My back and not My face on the day of their calamity**” (Jer 18:7-17).*

The Lord says, ask among the pagan nations of the world, “Who has heard things like these” - meaning the response of Israel to His invitation to return to Him, and the consequences of their rebellion. The “virgin Israel has done a most terrible thing,” without any reason for it. God charged, “My people have forgotten me” and turned to pagan gods. They refuse the ancient roads for a new path they had chosen for themselves. “They have made their land a horror , a perpetual object of scorn.” That is exactly what would happen when God raised up the Babylonians and used them to punish Judah and take the people into captivity for seventy years. They would be mocked by the nations around them. The nations would gloat over their catastrophe. What is God going to be doing during this time? He says, “I will show them My back and not My face on the day of their calamity.”

D. Now Look at Their Response, 18:18.

*“Then certain ones said, “**Come, let's make plans against Jeremiah, for the law will never be lost from the priest, or counsel from the wise, or an oracle from the prophet. Come, let's denounce him and pay no attention to all his words.**”*

They didn't like the message, so they moved to silence the messenger. It is interesting that the nation

was full of prophets who were saying what the people wanted to hear. None of those prophets stood up for Jeremiah. They were people pleasers. I am concerned that the day may be approaching in America when Christians will be persecuted and prosecuted for their stand for Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, former Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore as already paid a price for his commitment to the Word of God and that was simply a passive display of the Ten Commandments. Is it any wonder that Jeremiah was the weeping prophet. The wonder of it all is that we are not weeping for America today.

II. JEREMIAH CONFESSES THE SIN OF THE NATION, 14:7-10.

A. Jeremiah Confesses Their sins, 14:7.

“Though our guilt testifies against us, Lord, act for Your name’s sake. Indeed, our rebellions are many; we have sinned against You.”

Jeremiah is voicing this prayer for Judah. They are guilty of sin, missing the mark, or falling short of God’s will for them. They are also guilty of transgressions: “our rebellions are many.” He confesses for his people their guilt before the Lord. We can almost hear the desperation of David in this confession. Remember David’s pray for forgiveness:

“Be gracious to me, God, according to Your faithful love; according to Your abundant compassion, blot out my rebellion. Wash away my guilt, and cleanse me from my sin. For I am conscious of my rebellion, and my sin is always before me. **Against You—You alone—I have sinned and done this evil in Your sight.** So You are right when You pass sentence; You are blameless when You judge “(Psalms 51:1-4, HCSB).

After David was confronted with his sin with Bathsheba, he fell on his face before the Lord and confessed his sin. Sin was not the only thing he confessed. He confessed transgressions. He didn’t even stop there, he confessed his iniquity. Lest we think David is simply using three different words for sin, let me point out something we do not need to miss here. The word translated sin is the word which means to miss the mark, as when one fires an arrow at a target and it falls short or misses the mark. David has sinned. He had fallen short of God’s plan for his life. He had fallen short of God’s standard for kings. He had fallen short of God’s righteousness.

David confessed transgressions. The word translated transgression is the word that means to step over the line with your eyes wide open. David knew that adultery is a sin, but he saw Bathsheba, who, no doubt, was making it a point to be noticed. He was tempted. He felt lust for her, and that is sin. The then took steps to commit adultery. He took this action with his eyes wide open. He knew he was crossing the line, and he did it anyway. That is transgression, open rebellion against the Ten Commandments, transgression against the holiness of God.

When my brother Mike was in the army he was stationed in Germany well before the fall of the Iron Curtain, he had to stand duty on the border between West Germany and East Germany, or possibly Czechoslovakia. Mike told me after he came home that he and other soldiers would step over the line so that they could say they had been behind the Iron Curtain. They knew exactly where the line was, they knew that what the consequences would have been if they had been arrested, but they still stepped across the line with their eyes wide open. Now, that was not as dangerous as it might sound. Soldiers on both sides stepped across the line, just to say that had done it. If, however, they had been arrested they could not have claimed ignorance. They could not simply confess that they had committed sin, because they had committed a transgression. We see “No Trespassing” signs all along the highway in forested area of Louisiana. Those signs usually mean that the landowner does not allow people to hunt on his property without permission. Usually, these signs are respected, but if someone crosses the line he cannot claim ignorance.

David also confessed iniquity. Sin means to miss the mark. Transgression means to step across the line with your eyes wide open. Iniquity is a condition of the heart produced when one persists in sin and transgression. Iniquity means to be warped or twisted. Continual, persistent transgression leads to iniquity. Continual sin will warp and twist one’s life.

Jeremiah’s Judah was guilty of sin. They were guilty of transgression. Their constant rebellion against God’s Word and God’s Law had warped the hearts and minds of the people of Judah. They were well aware of what had happened to their sister nation, Israel, yet they refused to obey God. They were not only sinning, they arrogantly declared, “We will not obey. We will not listen.” We are blessed in America today with churches scattered all over the country, Christians television and radio stations, and many Christian publications. As a matter of fact, I have served on the Broadman and Holman Committee for LifeWay Christian Resources for several years and I hear reports from LifeWay Christian Stores, LifeWay Conference Centers, and from LifeWay Church Resource on a regular basis. A tremendous effort is put forth to reach America for Christ by many different Christian churches, denominations, and other Christian organizations. At the same time, millions of Americans live as though they have never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Countless Americans have heard the Gospel but they defiantly rebel against God and refuse to obey His commands.

B. He Pleads for Mercy, 14:8-10.

1. God is the hope of Israel, 14:8.

“Hope of Israel, its Savior in time of distress, why are You like an alien in the land, like a traveler stopping only for the night?”

- a. He is the Hope of Israel.
- b. He is “its Savior in time of distress.”
- c. He is “like an alien in the land.”
- d. He is like one who stops only for a night.

The people have rebelled against the Lord, and now He has withdrawn his grace from the nation. Individuals who believe will receive His grace, but the nation has rejected Him and now He has rejected them.

2. Jeremiah Pleads, “Lord...Don’t leave us”, 14:9.

“Why are You like a helpless man, like a warrior unable to save? Yet You are among us, Lord, and we are called by Your name. Don’t leave us!”

The people of Judah have said, we won’t listen to You! We won’t obey You! We don’t want You! Yet, Jeremiah knows He is their only hope and he pleads with the Lord, “Don’t leave us.” America, as a nation, seems to be running away from God, but committed, Bible based Christians are crying, “Lord, don’t leave us.” Dear friends, if God decides to show us His back rather than His face, we are in serious trouble.

C. The Lord Responds to Jeremiah, 14:10.

*“This is what the Lord says concerning these people: **Truly they love to wander; they never rest their feet. So the Lord does not accept them. Now He will remember their guilt and punish their sins.**”*

1. These people “love to wander.”

Their history verifies this. During the Period of the Judges, they had wandered from Him in a relentless cycle. They turned from God and worshiped the Canaanite gods. God sent an enemy to overrun them and make them pay tribute. They called on God for deliverance. God sent a judge to deliver them. They followed the Lord until that judge died, and then they began to wander again.

2. “The Lord does not accept them.”

He has made it very clear that He will forgive them and bless them if they confess their sins and follow him. They have made it just as clear that they refuse to do that. Now He tells Jeremiah to tell them that the Lord does not accept them.

3. “He will remember their guilt and punish their sins.”

God is not deceived by insincere repentance. Even though Jeremiah is sincere in his prayer, God knows that the people do not join him in confessing their sins. They may still be going to the temple, and they may be offering sacrifices, singing hymns, and performing other religious acts, but in their heart they have not repented - and do not intend to do so. They have refused to meet God in faith, so now they will meet Him in judgment.

III. THEY HAVE SOWN WHEAT BUT THEY WILL REAP THORNS, 12:10-13.

“Many shepherds have destroyed My vineyard; they have trampled My plot of land. They have turned My desirable plot into a desolate wasteland. They have made it a desolation. It mourns, desolate, before Me. All the land is desolate, but no one takes it to heart. Over all the barren heights in the wilderness the destroyers have come, for the Lord has a sword that devours from one end of the earth to the other. No one has peace. They have sown wheat but harvested thorns. They have exhausted themselves but have no profit. Be put to shame by your harvests because of the Lord’s burning anger.”

A. These People Have Violated God’s Vineyard.

God planted Israel a choice vineyard. But, He says, “Many shepherds have destroyed My vineyard; they have trampled My plot of land.” It may seem that He is mixing metaphors here. Shepherds tend sheep and vine dressers take care of the vineyard. However, both the sheep, or sheepfold, and the vineyard were metaphors for God’s Chosen People. The nation has wandered away from God, and the shepherds, false prophets and ungodly priests, bear the greatest guilt. The prophets prophesied lies, telling the people what they want to hear. The most popular preachers in America a century ago were those who ranted, raved, and shouted about sin and hell - “Turn of burn!”, they cried. The most popular preachers in America today avoid sin and punishment. There are churches today that tell us that do not want to hear anything about the blood or anything else “that might offend our people.” A young man with a silly grin, looks out at a vast audience and into the camera and affirms them, seeking to make them feel happy. He has said, as I have been told, that the worst thing you can do to a man is to tell him he is a sinner.” Are the shepherds destroying the vineyard in America today? I thank God that while Jeremiah had to stand alone, there are a lot of under shepherds who faithfully proclaim the Word of God every week in America. Let us pray that they will not compromise, as many have already done.

B. Consider God’s Law of Sowing and Reaping.

*“**They have sown wheat but harvested thorns.** They have exhausted themselves but have no profit. Be put to shame by your harvests because of the Lord’s burning anger.”*

I call this God’s Law of Sowing and Reaping. This law has been in effect since the Adam and Eve chose to rebel against the Lord in the Garden of Eden. They sowed to sin and reaped death. Let me share just a few references from Scripture that may expand our understanding of God’s Law of Sowing and Reaping:

“Indeed, they sow the wind and reap the whirlwind” (Hosea 8:7).

“Sow righteousness for yourselves and reap faithful love” (Hosea 10: 12a).

“You have plowed wickedness and reaped injustice” (Hosea 10:13a).

“Don’t be deceived: God is not mocked. **For whatever a man sows he will also reap**, because **the one who sows to his flesh will reap corruption** from the flesh, but **the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit**. So we must not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don’t give up” (Gal. 6:7-9).

C. Judah Was About to Reap the Harvest of the Seeds They Had Sown., Jer. 44:4ff.

1. “**I sent you all My servants the prophets** time and time again, saying, Don’t do this detestable thing that I hate” (44:4).
2. “**But they did not listen** or pay attention; they did not turn from their evil or stop burning incense to other gods” (44:5).
3. “**So My fierce wrath poured forth** and burned in Judah’s cities and Jerusalem’s streets so that they became the desolate ruin they are today” (44:6).
4. “You are provoking Me to anger by the work of your hands” (44:8A)
5. “Therefore, this is what the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: I am about to turn against you to bring disaster, to cut off all Judah” (44:11).

D. Jeremiah Records the People’s Response, 44:15-17.

*“However, all the men who knew that their wives were burning incense to other gods, all the women standing by—a great assembly—and all the people...answered Jeremiah, ‘As for the word you spoke to us in the name of the Lord, we **are not going to listen to you!** Instead, we will do everything we said we would: burn incense to the queen of heaven and offer drink offerings to her just as we, our fathers, our kings, and our officials did in Judah’s cities and in Jerusalem’s streets.’”*

E. America Is Mirrored in Jeremiah.

There is no sin mentioned in connection with ancient Judah that is not found in America. Immorality is spreading like cancer. Pornography is reaching into homes and churches. Liberals foster and defend a culture of death through abortion. Now with the Terri Schiavo case becoming the Roe V. Wade of euthanasia, that culture of death is spreading. The media is seeing to that. The ACLU is carrying on a war against the Ten Commandments. If they win that battle, where will they look next? You can be sure of this much - they already have the next target in mind. They have carried on a relentless war against God, from the Scope Trial in 1925 right on through the attack on Prayer in schools, Bible reading in the class room, on down to nursery rhymes and kindergarten stories, to

Christmas, and Easter. This Marxist organization has the support of liberal educators, politicians, and lawyers across the land.

We could go on and on, but it is sufficient to say that we have reached the point that we call good evil and evil good. There is a crusade going on against Jesus Christ by people who think they are brilliant, but they are too stupid to understand that if they use Islam against Christianity in an effort to convert America into a secular society, once Islam takes over, and that is their goal, there will never be a secular society again. It will be an Islamic society and those people who are carrying on the crusade against Jesus Christ will be victims of that evil religion.

CONCLUSION. Yes! It is serious. Yes, we are guilty of many of the sins of ancient Judah. Yes, we are sinning against a greater light. But is our destruction set as definitely as the destruction that God sent upon Judah? I cannot answer that with any authority, but it concerns me deeply that America is determined to reject God and create a secular society. It concerns me that this once great nation is becoming a nation I do not recognize. It concerns me that there is no sign that America is ever going to return to the Lord.

There is, however, some good news. God's Word is being printed, distributed, preached and taught. There are millions of genuine believers. We do not stand alone as Jeremiah did. There is still hope - if Jesus delays His return. Here is God's answer for us today:

“My people who are called by My name humble themselves, pray and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land” (2 Chron 7:14).

I urgently appeal to you to join me in humbling ourselves before the Lord, turning from our wicked ways, and praying for revival in our land.

