The Stubborn Refusal To Repent
Jeremiah 8:1-22

Introduction

Jeremiah brings up the issue of repentance over and over again. Over and over again I have reminded you that repentance includes a change of mind; a willingness to do good instead of evil; a change of heart; instead of loving sin we set our affections on the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a change of life. That is the external demonstration of an internal change.

Warren Wiersbe in his commentary Be Decisive hits the nail on the head and asks the question; “Why did the nation not turn back to God?” In answering the question, Jeremiah dealt with three aspects of the people’s stubborn refusal to obey God.

The people’s refusal to repent was (1) irrational; (2) rooted in deception; and (3) absent any real understanding of consequences. The false teachers and false leaders did not help matters. The false teachers deceived the people by twisting God’s Law and God’s Word; for this they would be judged-shamed and taken captive.

The first three verses really conclude the thoughts of the previous chapter.

The Refusal To Repent Is Irrational (vv. 4-7)

Jeremiah 8:4 (NKJV) Moreover you shall say to them, Thus says the Lord: Will they fall and not rise? Will one turn away and not return?

A baby when it falls learns to get up. When you mature, you may fall again and again; but it is reasonable to get up. A person who turns in the wrong direction; when they discover they are going the wrong direction; they turn around! The Lord asks a series of questions. The questions are clear and direct. Why won’t you be sensible? Why won’t you be reasonable? Sin is irrational. Righteousness is reasonable. Once again Jeremiah uses the word shub which means to turn or return. It seems to include two dimensions; the turning away from one thing; and the turning towards another thing.

The Hebrew text reads; im yashub welo yashub? Literally “If one turn will he not turn?” The same verb here connotes first “sin” and then “repent”. Rabbi Kimchi interpreted it, “If man turns from evil, shall not the Lord turn from judgment?”

Jeremiah 8:5 (NKJV) 5 Why has this people slidden back, Jerusalem, in a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, They refuse to return.

The people were following a personal path of deception exacerbated by the false teachers. The people were not without blame. They allowed themselves to be deceived so they could follow a path of self-indulgence, to satisfy and justify personal pleasure; and all that this life has to offer apart from God and His remedy for sin.
At the core of the “deceit” is the continued practice of idolatry! The people refuse to give up their idols!

Jeremiah 8:6 (NKJV) 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.

Down through the centuries the Lord listened patiently, in mercy and love and waited for the people to cry out to Him in repentance. No man repented of his wickedness. No one was willing to ask the basic question; “What have I done?”

The Lord was waiting for the prayer of repentance. But the prayer never came! Not only did the people refuse to pray, refuse to repent, but they galloped like a horse--as fast as they could towards destruction!

When a warrior rides hard into battle the horse can be killed within minutes. This is in part the internal dynamic of sin! It can kill so easily!

Did you know the Lord eagerly waits for your prayer of repentance?

Jeremiah 8:7 (NKJV) Even the stork in the heavens Knows her appointed times; And the turtledove, the swift, and the swallow Observe the time of their coming. But My people do not know the judgment of the Lord.

The people showed less understanding than birds. Bird’s instinctively know where to go.

In the land of Palestine the swallows often remain for the winter. The return of the swift is sudden and dramatic. Here the judgment (ordinance is mishpat translated law in 5:4). Here the judgment of the Lord includes what God has said and done--the known will of God in contrast to the written word of God.

In the book It Couldn’t Just Happen (pp.106-107; quoted in A Closer Look At The Evidence; May 6th;);

Modern airplanes navigate electronically. They pick up radio or satellite signals, and complicated equipment translates the signal to tell the pilots his or her location. But for years we have known that birds can navigate across great distances without any mechanical aids. In one test of this incredible ability, a number of Manx Shearwaters, which nest off the coast of Wales, were tagged and released at different points far beyond their usual range. One was turned loose in Boston, some 3,200 miles from home. In just twelve and half days the bird returned to its nest, having traveled 250 miles a day starting from a place thousands of miles from where it had never been before. What’s more, based on the known speed of the bird, it must
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*have flown directly home across the open ocean. No one knows how it did this. Could the incredible navigational system of birds have “just happened”? Both the Bible and science indicate otherwise.*

Birds know how to find their way home! Do you know how to find your way home?

The Refusal To Repent Is Based On Self-Deception (vv.8-12)

*Jeremiah 8:8 (NKJV) 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.*

The people boasted they had the Temple. The people boasted they had the Law. But even God’s law can be abused. Jeremiah’s attention seems focused on the Scribes, the spiritual leaders.

Warren Wiersbe was right when he wrote; “*possessing the Scriptures is not the same as practicing the Scriptures.*”

Does the mere presence of a Bible keep a nation from crumbling, or keep a family from falling apart? The possession of a Bible and the profession of faith and the practice of Christians have never been wider!

Jesus in the New Testament asks the people to look at what is written and what is meant or what is the intention of the command. The Lord Jesus is far more severe than Jeremiah with the religious leaders (see Matt. 12:1-12; 19:3-9).

“*The false prophets, who claimed to be writing and speaking in the name of the Lord, deceived the kingdom of Judah. They were men whose personal lives were godless, whose hearts were covetous, and whose remedies for the problems of the nation were useless. Their ministry was popular because they majored on the superficial and marketed whatever good news the people wanted to hear (see 5:12; 14:13–15; 27:8–9; 28:1–17). Jeremiah pictured these men as deceitful physicians (6:14; 8:11), empty wind (5:13), dispensers of chaff (23:28), ruthless, selfish shepherds (23:1–4), and infected people spreading disease (23:15, NIV). God had not sent these so-called prophets (14:14; 23:18, 21; 29:9, 31), nor did they receive their messages from God (23:25–28)” (Warren Wiersbe)

Do we become like the people we follow? Do godless leaders produce godless followers? Jeremiah seemed to have few friends and fewer followers.

*Jeremiah 8:9 (NKJV) 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?
The spiritual leaders were grouped into three divisions, the prophets, the priests, the wise. Wisdom sought to discern our relation to God and our relation to one another. The wise did not claim direct revelation like the prophets, or to represent the people to God like the priest, but the wise recognized that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and focused on the glory of God and cultivating a reverence for God. The wise produced books like Psalms, Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes and the Apocryphal books of Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon. The Old Testament accords them respect; but Jeremiah did not consider them infallible (18:18).

The word of the Lord is the Torah (but now the observant Jew considers all of God’s commandments). The Scribes play a major role in the New Testament narratives; but are first mentioned as a class or group in 2 Chronicles 13. Some have suggested they began their work as a group during the reign of King Hezekiah. Prior to the Scribes the schools of the prophets seem to have been custodians of the written revelation.

Paul the Apostle wrote; “Our sufficiency is from God, who has qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life. . .Whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds; but when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed” (2 Cor. 3:5-6; 15-16). One clear evidence of repentance is you begin to understand the Bible--it’s intent as well as its content!

In Psalm 19:7 The Bible says, “The law of the Lord is perfect.” Jesus says, “Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key to knowledge” (Luke 11:52).

Anyone can get a Bible practically for free. But what happens when you reject the Word of God? You must reject wisdom. Human wisdom fails. True wisdom must incorporate love for God and a passionate devotion to his will.

Jeremiah 8:10 (NKJV) 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.

Jeremiah 8:11 (NKJV) For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, Saying, Peace, peace! When there is no peace.

Jeremiah 8:12 (NKJV) 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.

The Refusal To Repent Leads To Judgment (vv.13-22)

“These verses blend three voices: God’s voice of judgment, the people’s voice of despair, and the prophet’s voice of anguish as he contemplated the ruin of a once-great nation. God declared that the fields would be ruined (vv. 13, 17), the cities would be destroyed (v. 17), and the people
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would be either slain or taken captive (v. 19). It would be like drinking poison (8:14; 9:15; 23:15), experiencing an earthquake (8:16), being attacked by venomous snakes (v. 17), or being crushed and broken (v. 21)” (Warren Wiersbe).

Jeremiah 8:13 (NKJV) I will surely consume them, says the Lord. No grapes shall be on the vine, Nor figs on the fig tree, And the leaf shall fade; And the things I have given them shall pass away from them.

The Lord compares the people to plants that produce no fruit and leaves that are dead. How often does Jesus incorporate the same images?

The image is of dead trees being used for fuel.

Jeremiah 8:14 (NKJV) 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.

The people of Judea and Jerusalem speak. They understand that they are being punished by God. The people determine to go to the fortified cities. The water of gall is poisoned water.

Jeremiah 8:15 (NKJV) We looked for peace, but no good came; And for a time of health, and there was trouble!

These words are repeated in 14:19.

Jeremiah 8:16 (NKJV) 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.

Whose voice should we ascribe to this verse? The Lord? The prophet? The people? The picture is of the invading army from the North as it consumes the land and its people!

Jeremiah 8:17 (NKJV) For behold, I will send serpents among you, Vipers which cannot be charmed, And they shall bite you, says the Lord.

This is the voice of the Lord. The serpents are the enemies, the invading enemies, they will not be charmed or dissuaded. The practice of snake charming is ancient and widespread. The foreign intrigues and political policies of the government of Jerusalem was like snake charming.

Jeremiah 8:18 (NKJV) I would comfort myself in sorrow; My heart is faint in me.
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Now Jeremiah in poetic fashion attempts to quiet the turmoil inside his own soul. There is a war raging inside the prophet. Jeremiah expresses his grief, his sorrow. The prophet is sensitive and sincere. Later Jeremiah will communicate his disgust and revulsion over what is taking place.

Jeremiah 8:19 (NKJV)  
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?

What is Jeremiah making reference to? Perhaps the exile (v.19); perhaps a drought (v.20).

The people cry, “God has failed”. God answers; ‘No the people have failed’. Once again Judea is called “the daughter of my people”. The emphasis is on God’s tenderness!

Constant provocation has produced in God a righteous anger. The idols are proof! The importation of foreign gods and goddesses are proof! Tenderness and anger!

Jeremiah 8:20 (NKJV)  
The harvest is past, The summer is ended, And we are not saved!

The statement is a proverb. The people had missed their God-given opportunity to be saved. The people cry-- “it’s too late--we’ve gone to far--we’ve crossed the line”.

Harvest comes from April to June; summer is the time when summer fruits are gathered. If the harvest fails, there is still hope from the summer; if the summer like-wise fails, there is no hope.

Saved means a lot of things. Saved from death, saved from enemies. It can mean saved from sin.

AND IT WOULD NOT COME AGAIN.

Jeremiah 8:21 (NKJV)  
For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt. I am mourning; Astonishment has taken hold of me.

Once again Jeremiah identifies with his people. His preaching still has not yielded the desired results. Jeremiah sees their judgment and their hurt and their deprivation and their pain as his own. Their wound is his wound.

The expression “I am mourning” literally reads “I am black”. Astonishment has taken hold of me or more literally, to fast, to bind, to tie tightly.
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Jeremiah 8:22 (NKJV) 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?

This verse is well known and often quoted! The prophet is asking in sheer terror, in astonishment, if Ephraim lacks what was given to Ephraim, in preference to every other Gentile country; the life giving knowledge of the true and living God!

Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no medicine? The people need help and health! Why is Ephraim still sick?

Why aren’t people saved? And why do saved people act as if they are not saved?

Why do people reject, neglect, ignore, the Bible? Doesn’t the Bible tell us how we can be saved? How can we neglect the resources of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word?

According to Pliny, balsam was produced only in Palestine. This was a special plant, used for medicinal purposes! Some have suggested the styrax tree as a possible source; the balm was there in abundance but the people refused the cure! Gilead was east of the Jordan, and north of Moab. No physician means no prophet, no teacher, no scribe, no wise man, no priest, no spiritual leader! Isn’t there anyone who knows how to apply the timeless truth of God’s Word to the present ills?

Why then is there no recovery? Literally “Why has the new flesh (which grows over a wound) not come up? Why hasn’t the wound closed? Why hasn’t healing come?

Conclusion

“The false prophets had made a wrong diagnosis and prescribed the wrong remedy, and the wounds of the nation were still open, bleeding, and infected. “To the Law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20, NKJV) ” (Warren Wiersbe).

Why continue in sin? Why continue in rebellion? The sin doesn’t satisfy. The rebellion does not provide what we need most!