

18. The results of backsliding

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According to the dictionary which I use in all of my studies, the definition of 'backslide' is: "to relapse into bad habits, sinful behavior". This phrase reminded me a vivid description of a verse from the Book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 26:11 As a dog returns to his own vomit, So a fool repeats his folly.

You get my point, right? Though we all wrinkle our eyebrows in that description and clearly understand what it means, but when it comes our own spiritual lives, we don't want to describe it quite in that way. But no matter how we want to candy coat it, backsliding is ugly and another way to say "disobedience to God"

The 19th Century British statesman Richard Cobden once said, "Every great nation fell by suicide." Boy, if that doesn't reflect the current situation of the United States of America, I don't know what else. It also illustrates the kingdom of Judah. Sudden political or military blows from the outside didn't destroy Judah. Just like what is happening in America now, Judah was thoroughly decayed morally and spiritually from within. These last two chapters of 2 Kings tell the tragic story of the last years of an once-great-nation. I believe that we can learn a lot from it.

A. THE FIRST INVASION OF BABYLON IN 605 B.C.

2 Kings 24:1-4 In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his vassal for three years. Then he turned and rebelled against him. 2 And the Lord sent against him raiding bands of Chaldeans, bands of Syrians, bands of Moabites, and bands of the people of Ammon; He sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord which He had spoken by His servants the prophets. 3 Surely at the commandment of the Lord this came upon Judah, to remove them from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, 4 and also because of the innocent blood that he had shed; for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the Lord would not pardon.

God had given the Israelites the occupancy of the land on one condition: their obedience to Him. Did they still own the land? Oh, yes. God had given them the land by an unconditional covenant. But their occupancy was conditional, and they failed to meet that condition.

God's faithfulness has both sides – blessings for our obedience and punishment for our disobedience. He would not wink at our sins and think that it is cute since we are His children like some parents who would not discipline their children because it might hurt their self-esteem. By the way, there is a Greek word for that – Hogwash.

We have a tendency to think that the Lord should be faithful in blessing us, but not in chastising. But because of the nature of His holiness and righteousness, He can not and will not let us get by with our disobedience and sins. He loves us too much to let that happens to us.

B. THE SECOND INVASION OF BABYLON IN 597 B.C.

2 Kings 24:8-14 Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. His mother's name was Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. 9 And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done. 10 At that time the servants of

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. 11 And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, as his servants were besieging it. 12 Then Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his servants, his princes, and his officers went out to the king of Babylon; and the king of Babylon, in the eighth year of his reign, took him prisoner. 13 And he carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house, and he cut in pieces all the articles of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord, as the Lord had said. 14 Also he carried into captivity all Jerusalem: all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land.

Jehoiachin did evil in the sight of the Lord. He just didn't get it. That was the reason why they were invaded by the enemies constantly in their history. Rather than obeying the Lord and worshiping Him, he worshiped idols of the pagan nations around them.

When Christians backslide, they lose what they cherish and value highly – family, trust and respect as the people of Judah lost the treasures of the house of the Lord and all the articles of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord.

Some ancient traditions tell us that Jeremiah hid the ark of the covenant before this, so that it was not among the things that were cut up and carried back to Babylon. I wouldn't be one bit surprised if it shows up during the time of Tribulation right before rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem by the antichrist. It would be a nice touch for him to use it as a bait against the Israel people.

I need to stop here and talk about backsliding of the believers of Jesus Christ. You may say, "It will never happen to me. Because I am so close to God. There is no way." I have known many people who have walked with the Lord for years, including some Calvary Chapel pastors whom I personally knew and respected, and then they fell to the most blatant and obvious sins.

No one suddenly backslides. We see someone who falls away from the Lord and we say, "How could that be? He seemed to be doing so well." Know this: The steps may have been taken in secret, but clearly they were being taken. Every moment of every day, we are either building up our spiritual character or weakening it. We must always watch out.

What is the starting point of backsliding? Losing our first love for the Lord is at the root of all sin.

When I officiate wedding ceremonies and I pray for a long lasting marriage of groom and bride. At the ceremony they look at each other with those gooey eyes and hold their hands and smile non-stop like absent minded people while the bride's father was just about having a heart attack when he gets the bill for the wedding reception. If someone say to the bride and groom that they would end up in a divorce court in a few years, they would deny it emphatically. I just hope and pray that each marriage I officiate would last their life time. But if they lose their first love for one another, they would become another statistics of divorced couples in America.

Just like that, when a believer loses his first love for the Lord, backsliding is a natural course.

Here is a list of some typical symptoms of a backsliding person though it is not comprehensive. See if your mindset is matching with this:

- 1) You come up with many silly excuses why you can not read the Bible and have daily devotion everyday.
- 2) You'd rather hang around with worldly carnal people than godly people, because it appeals to your flesh.
- 3) You start to find faults with other Christians and blame them for not wanting to be with them.
- 4) Going to church becomes burdensome and you feel that it is not necessary to go to church services and Bible studies that once you could not have enough.
- 5) You start to lower your high godly standards to accommodate your compromise with the world.

The backsliding of Israel started with the smartest man ever lived – king Solomon. He was told by the law of God not to marry foreign women which he promptly disobeyed by marrying 700 wives and 300 concubines. Obviously this guy was not thinking straight for many reasons. The Bible says that his wives turned his heart against God. This supposedly smart king introduced idol worship to Israel.

1 Kings 11:4 For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David.

I am sure that you have heard someone wise said, "If you give an inch to satan, he will become your ruler."

In v14, we find king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took many captives. Among them were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. Today satan wants to take our future generation as his captives through the liberal and ungodly educational systems. Many of universities, college professors and school teachers are anti-God and they would do just about anything including twisting and ignoring the truth to capture the hearts of our young people.

Moms and dads, don't think that our church Youth Group and Sunday School classes can teach your children enough of what they need spiritually. They only spend two hours of a week at the maximum. You get to have them the majority of the time. If you don't teach them the Christian values and the truth of God from the Bible, they will be deceived and they will become another of satan's captives of the spiritual war.

C. THE THIRD INVASION OF BABYLON IN 588 B.C.

2 Kings 25:1-7 Now it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem and encamped against it; and they built a siege wall against it all around. 2 So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. 3 By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine had become so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. 4 Then the city wall was broken through, and all the men of war fled at night by way of the gate between two walls, which was by the king's

garden, even though the Chaldeans were still encamped all around against the city. And the king went by way of the plain. 5 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his army was scattered from him. 6 So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they pronounced judgment on him. 7 Then they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon.

The siege of Jerusalem began on January 15, 588, and continued until July 18, 586, when the famine was so severe the people were cooking and eating their own children according to Lamentations 4.

During this time of siege, the hypocritical and weak king Zedekiah told prophet Jeremiah to ask the Lord what he should do, but the king refused to accept the prophet's answer. Zedekiah asked Jeremiah to pray for him, yet the king was a proud man who refused to humble himself and pray to God for himself. This is a typical attitude of a backslidden Christian – still wanting God's favor, but doesn't want to go to Him in humility.

I find three results of backsliding of a believer of God through this portion of the passage:

1) They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes

When a Christian backslides, the consequence of his or her sins even applies to his or her family member. Don't think that you are the only one who will go through it. Your innocent loved ones will go through difficulties because of your sinful action.

2) [They] put out the eyes of Zedekiah

When a Christian backslides, he or she becomes spiritually blinded. They don't see what is right or wrong. There is no rationale. That is what sin does to us – makes us stupid and blinded.

3) [They] bound him with bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon

Satan cannot possess the hearts of the believers of Jesus Christ, because those hearts are occupied by the Holy Spirit. He will not become a roommate with some demons in our hearts.

However, Christians can certainly be oppressed or addicted to the things that would ruin his or her life, such as alcohol, drugs, pornography, gambling and others, due to the results of their backsliding. They become captives of their sins and think that there is no way out.

D. THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR MERCIFUL GOD IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE

2 Kings 25:27-30 Now it came to pass in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, that Evil-Merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison. 28 He spoke kindly to him, and gave him a more prominent seat than those of the kings who were with him in Babylon. 29 So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments, and he ate bread regularly before the king all the days of his life. 30 And as for his provisions, there was a regular ration given him by the king, a portion for each day, all the days of his life.

I am so glad that the Lord chose to include this portion in this dark chapter of 2 Kings.

There is no sin that God cannot forgive with the exception of unrepented sins. While it is true that God will pardon all sin, the sinner will have to come to Him in repentance. When a sinner comes to the Lord, He is faithful and just to forgive his sins and cleanse him or her from all unrighteousness.

When God forgives, He forgets. He is not only willing but pleased to use any vessel - just as long as it is clean today.

Isaiah 43:25 I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

Micah 7:19 Once again You will have compassion on us. You will trample our sins under your feet and throw them into the depths of the ocean!

Lamentations 3:22-23 Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. 23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

Pride paralyzes us. It deadens us to our need and numbs our feelings of gratitude toward God. But forgiveness releases us. We are happiest when we feel forgiven – free of spiritual debt, free of guilt, free of shame.

E. THE QUESTIONS YOU MUST ASK YOURSELF BEFORE YOU SIN

As many biblical scholars and teachers, I too, believe that we are literally living in the end time. There is absolutely no prophecy needs to be fulfilled before Jesus comes down to get us up to heaven which is known as the rapture. It will happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

With that in mind, before you choose to sin against God next time, before you come up with another silly excuse why you don't want to have anything to do with God, ask yourself these questions:

1) Is this a good time to sin against God?

2) Is this sin worth ruining my life, putting my family through misery and bringing disgrace to my God?