

11. The consequences of the object of our worship

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I am sure that you've heard a quote from philosopher George Santayana: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." How true!!!

As we studied the Book of Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles, we had to shake our heads in dismay, because it seems that the ancient Israelis chose not to remember their ancestors' past that caused them to be in deep troubles against the Lord repeatedly with the same reasons. We are about to meet a group of people who topped them all. They were acting as if they all had a major case of amnesia.

Because they disobeyed the Lord, He used king Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army to invade their land and took hundreds, and thousands of people to Babylon in exile. This did not happen just once, but three times – 597 B.C., 587 B.C., and 582 B.C. Forgetting what happened in their land and why is like forgetting 9/11 for us.

Rather than worshipping the Lord their God, they chose false gods and idols. The consequences of their object of their worship spelled their doom.

A. REBUKED BY THE WORLD

Jeremiah 40:2-4 And the captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him: "The Lord your God has pronounced this doom on this place. 3 Now the Lord has brought it, and has done just as He said. Because you people have sinned against the Lord, and not obeyed His voice, therefore this thing has come upon you. 4 And now look, I free you this day from the chains that were on your hand. If it seems good to you to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will look after you. But if it seems wrong for you to come with me to Babylon, remain here. See, all the land is before you; wherever it seems good and convenient for you to go, go there."

Jeremiah was released and given a choice of going to Babylon and being cared for by the king or remaining in the nearly destroyed land and to care for the people. Being a man of God with a shepherd heart, Jeremiah chose to stay with his people who rejected him continually.

Nebuzaradan, the captain of the king Nebuchadnezzar's guard rebuked the Israelis with the same message that Jeremiah preached for last 40 years. It must have been embarrassing for the Jews to hear a pagan Babylonian tell them that they sinned against their God.

Doesn't this incident remind you of what Abraham did in Genesis 20?

Genesis 20:9-10 And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done." 10 Then Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?"

When a believer of God displays behavior or says something that is contrary what the world knows a Christian is supposed to be, that believer deserves to be rebuked by the world.

B. INSURRECTION BY ISHMAEL

Jeremiah 41:1-3 Now it came to pass in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal family and of the officers of the king, came with ten men to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, at Mizpah. And there they ate bread together in Mizpah. 2 Then Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men who were with him, arose and struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with the sword, and killed him whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land. 3 Ishmael also struck down all the Jews who were with him, that is, with Gedaliah at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans who were found there, the men of war.

Who was this Ishmael? He was a descendant of David through one of his sons, Elishama. I wouldn't doubt that he felt that he should have been in the position of one of the rulers as David's descendant, not someone who was appointed by Babylon. Then, was he a patriot? Not really, because he was hired by another pagan king of the Ammonites to take advantage of crumbled Israel.

C. SHOPPING FOR COUNSELING

Jeremiah 41:11-14 But when Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces that were with him heard of all the evil that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done, 12 they took all the men and went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah; and they found him by the great pool that is in Gibeon. 13 So it was, when all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces who were with him, that they were glad. 14 Then all the people whom Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah turned around and came back, and went to Johanan the son of Kareah.

Jeremiah 41:17 And they departed and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is near Bethlehem, as they went on their way to Egypt

Jeremiah 42:19-22 The Lord has said concerning you, O remnant of Judah, 'Do not go to Egypt!' Know certainly that I have admonished you this day. 20 For you were hypocrites in your hearts when you sent me to the Lord your God, saying, 'Pray for us to the Lord our God, and according to all that the Lord your God says, so declare to us and we will do it.' 21 And I have this day declared it to you, but you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God, or anything which He has sent you by me. 22 Now therefore, know certainly that you shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence in the place where you desire to go to dwell."

Johanan showed courage in rescuing the Jews, but when he was finally in charge, he revealed his own lack of faith by wanting to take the remnant to Egypt. He and his people would rather depend on Egypt than the Lord. Isn't that the exact same concept king Zedekiah did and failed miserably?

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

Hosea 11:7 My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, None at all exalt Him.

When Johanan asked Jeremiah about God's command for them, they had already made up their minds to go to Egypt. They were just looking for God's agreement. Sometimes God's people make the same approach in discerning the will of God. Instead of coming to the Lord with a blank heart where He can write His commands, they just want the Lord to agree with their decisions and bless them. In other words, they are shopping for counseling that would go along with what they want. Many people do the same thing in looking for a church. They do church shopping until

they find where they hear a pastor who scratches their emotional itch spots with pep talks, not seeking the truth of God.

What's up with the Israelis for Egypt? Ever since Abraham's lapse of faith in going to Egypt in Genesis 12, the Israelis had a tendency to follow his example. How often did the Jews want to go back to Egypt during the wilderness journey as if they forgot all about their miserable slave life? The very 40 year wilderness wandering started at Kadesh-Barnea because of their refusal to enter into the Promised Land and desiring to go back to Egypt. The Bible shows us that Egypt is a term in typology for the world.

D. THE ARROGANT REBELLION

Jeremiah 43:1-3 Now it happened, when Jeremiah had stopped speaking to all the people all the words of the Lord their God, for which the Lord their God had sent him to them, all these words, 2 that Azariah the son of Hoshaiiah, Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men spoke, saying to Jeremiah, "You speak falsely! The Lord our God has not sent you to say, 'Do not go to Egypt to dwell there.' 3 But Baruch the son of Neriah has set you against us, to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they may put us to death or carry us away captive to Babylon."

Jeremiah 44:7-9 Now therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Why do you commit this great evil against yourselves, to cut off from you man and woman, child and infant, out of Judah, leaving none to remain, 8 in that you provoke Me to wrath with the works of your hands, burning incense to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have gone to dwell, that you may cut yourselves off and be a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth? 9 Have you forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, the wickedness of the kings of Judah, the wickedness of their wives, your own wickedness, and the wickedness of your wives, which they committed in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?

Jeremiah 44:15-18 Then all the men who knew that their wives had burned incense to other gods, with all the women who stood by, a great multitude, and all the people who dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying: 16 "As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not listen to you! 17 But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, were well-off, and saw no trouble. 18 But since we stopped burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine."

Chronologically, Jeremiah was in Egypt and was probably giving his last prophecy. What we will see from chapter 45 to 52 is a collection of his prophecies that he gave earlier in his ministry. There, the prophet probably spent the remainder of his life, still seeking in vain to turn the people to God from whom they had so long revolted. There is no authentic record of his death.

It is just horrifying how people's hearts can be seared and hardened with the flimsy excuses for their wicked sins. These Israelis became remnants because of their disobedience to the Lord. We are no different than them without our God

The Lord had a cure for them. I heard a story about a lamb and a shepherd. When a lamb repeatedly jeopardized his own safety by continually wandering away from the flock, the shepherd would break its leg. Then, throughout the healing process, the shepherd would carry the straying lamb on his shoulder, during which time something amazing transpired in the lamb. When after five or six weeks, his bone could again support his weight, the lamb remained close to the shepherd, never to wander again – not because he feared another broken bone, but because he had become attached to the shepherd.

The Lord did that to Israel, not just once, but twice. First, Babylon exile due to their continual disobedience and idolatry, and, second, the rejection of Jesus Christ in A.D. 70.

If we wander away and continue in sin, our Good Shepherd breaks the bone of our self-sufficiency in order to force us to draw close to Him in ways we never would have otherwise.

Unless the Word of God is obeyed and worked out practically in our lives, God can't bless us as He desires to do. The people, however, preferred to break the covenant and worship false gods like these Israelis.

But what we worship and the way we worship are not incidentals in life; they're essentials that determine the character of life itself. Pastor Eugene Peterson said, "A people's lives are only as good as their worship. Worship defines life. If worship is corrupt, life will be corrupt." Well said.

God gave His people the covenant, so He might bless them and keep the good promises He made to them, but His people preferred to trust the gods of their pagan neighbors. He gave us far more than the covenant the OT Israel people had. We have Jesus and the Bible. We really don't have an excuse not to trust His promises and faithfulness.

Listen, worship has consequences, either good or bad, and in the case of Judah, the consequences were bad. The people knew that the curses and judgments were written into the covenant, but they thought God wouldn't send judgment on His own chosen people. God always keeps His promises, whether to bless or to chasten, and the greater the privileges we have from Him, the greater the responsibility we have to Him.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Unless the Word of God is obeyed and worked out practically in our lives, God can't bless us as He desires to do.

2) Worship defines life. If worship is corrupt, life will be corrupt as well.