



“But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone” (Jeremiah 5:23).

Dedication or Desolation

Central Truth: Disobedience causes individuals (and nations) to be forsaken by God; dedication causes them to find favor with God.

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Topic: Disobedience: Of Israel; Israel: Rebellion of; Rebellion: Of Israel.

“The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us” (Ecclesiastes 1:9, 10). That is the biblical way of saying, “History repeats itself.”

History does repeat itself, not so much in the repetition of exact events as in the reoccurring of the same problems which demand the same answer. Because we believe that, we find it profitable to study the history of ancient Israel and discover principles of God's dealings with her. Such a study affords guidelines by which problems can be evaluated today and provides answers to national problems which nations face in this generation.

This quarter of thirteen lessons is set in the historical period from the restoration of the kingdom of Judah after the Babylonian captivity to the ministry of John the Baptist. The aim for the quarter is “to gain assurance concerning today's national problems through a study of God's dealings with His people” in that time period. The concern of the study, therefore, is not historical but spiritual. How does God deal with a nation whose political, economic, social, and spiritual conditions are like our nation today? The principles of God's work in history will answer that question.

I. THE CAUSE OF DISOBEDIENCE

The cause of all personal and national distress is the neglect of God's will. It is that spiritual condition described by Jeremiah as being “without understanding,” having eyes and not seeing, having ears, and not hearing. Why do people with capacity to see and hear God refuse to do so? Jeremiah answers, “*This people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart*” (verse 23). The trouble with man is heart trouble. “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*” (Jeremiah 17:9). What does that say about the problem of man? The term heart is used in three meanings in the Bible. (1) It speaks of the center or depth, as the heart of the sea. (2) It speaks of the fleshly organ in the chest cavity which pumps the blood. (3) It speaks of the inner personality of man — the mind, the emotions, and the will. It is in that third sense that Jeremiah said the heart was deceitful and desperately wicked.

Man disobeys God because his thoughts are evil. “*And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*” (Genesis 6:5). A man's thoughts determine his actions. Wicked thoughts produce wicked works.

Man disobeys God because his emotions are perverted. “*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil*” (John 3:19). A man will seek that which he loves, whether works of darkness or deeds of light.

Man disobeys God because his will is in rebellion against God. “*Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: . . . fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others*” (Ephesians 2:2, 3).

It is the same in every generation. In Jeremiah's day as in our own, men disobey God because they think evil thoughts, love wrong things, and will to disobey Him.

II. THE FOOLISHNESS OF DISOBEDIENCE (Jeremiah 5:22, 23)

A. It is foolish to disobey God, for He is the Creator (verse 22). He has placed the bounds of the sea by His command. His power holds all nature in the assigned place and function for which He designed it. He even created man. He asks, “*Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence?*”

He is called “God Almighty” in Holy Scripture. That name suggests

that He exercises “all-might.” *“And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”* (Daniel 4:35).

Consider the audacity of sin. The creature stands up against the Creator! God warns. *“Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioned it, What makest thou? or to thy work, He hath no hands? . . . I have made the earth, and created man upon it: . . . I will direct all his ways”* (Isaiah 45:9, 12, 13),

B. It is foolish to disobey God, for He is our Sustainer (verse 24). He gives the rain in the proper season; He sets the time and provides the harvest. All things come of Him and every creature on earth is dependent upon Him, *“For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness”* (Psalm 107:9), Sin is a rebellion against the Creator and the Sustainer. It is exceedingly sinful.

III. THE LOSS BY DISOBEDIENCE (Jeremiah 5:25)

What a solemn word the Lord has spoken: *“Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you”* (Jeremiah 5:25). Blessings are missed when people disobey God, The prophet Isaiah set forth the solemn alternative in these words: *“If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it”* (Isaiah 1:19, 20).

God always rewards righteousness and punishes sin. *“I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments”* (Exodus 20:5, 6). *“Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go. O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea: Thy seed also had been as the sand, and the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof; his name should not have been cut off nor destroyed from before me”* (Isaiah 48:17-19).

How much blessing has been lost by disobedience, and how much suffering has been experienced? Let men learn!

IV. THE COURSE OF DISOBEDIENCE (Jeremiah 5:26-28)

A. Disobedience to God manifests itself by deceitful dealings with men (verses 26, 27). Imagine a people which calls itself “the chosen people of God” setting each against another. Yet, that was what ancient Judah did. Like a man would set a snare to trap a wild animal, so men set a trap to catch men. They had gained wealth, but it was by deceit and cheating. The result was that God did not see their wealth so much as the manner by which it was accumulated.

However a person deals with his fellowman, he is dealing in that same way with God, for man is made in the image of God. One cannot bless God and curse man (James 3:9, 10). Deceitful dealings with men is open rebellion against God and will surely receive His judgment.

B. Unethical standards of conduct develop when one begins to disobey God (verse 28). When people commit wickedness, they change their standards that their wickedness might not seem so evil. A change of standards does not change right or wrong.

God said of ancient Judah, “They pass over wicked deeds. They do not judge causes, but judge partially for the sake of men. They are not concerned that justice is done.”

That is the ultimate course of sin. When people do not want to serve God, they pretend that the standards have changed. That is so prevalent today with the public attitude toward immorality and sexual perversion. Homosexuality is flaunted as if God had not spoken on the issue, and the public is not offended by it. Such a course of sin always brings judgment.

V. THE END OF DISOBEDIENCE (Jeremiah 5:29)

God asked a rhetorical question: “I shall visit the nation for these things, shall I not?” The expected answer is, “Yes, you will!” God asked again, “My soul shall be avenged for a nation that acts like this, will it not?” The expected answer is, “Yes, it will!” Behold the judgment which comes on sin.

Judah went away into political, social, and spiritual captivity because of her turning from God. Seventy years she was in bondage before deliverance came. What will God do to a nation today that rejects Him? He will judge her, will He not? Of course He will!

VI. THE AUDACITY OF DISOBEDIENCE (Jeremiah 5:30, 31)

Sin against God is “wonderful and horrible.” It fills one with amazement and fear when the prophets prophesy falsely, the priests work for money, and the people want it that way.

Jeremiah tried to stem the tide of sin in his nation. He preached, and prayed, and wept. But like so many prophets before him, he was opposed by some and ignored by the rest.

“And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion of his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, . . . he gave them all into his hand. . . . To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths” (II Chronicles 36:15-17, 21).

1. Why is a study of Bible history profitable today?
2. Who was Jeremiah?
3. What causes a nation to go into sin and reject God?
4. Why is the heart of man set on sin?
5. Why is it foolish to disobey God?
6. What blessings does a nation miss by disobedience?