

THE EMPTINESS OF RELIGION

Jeremiah 7:4-16

Introduction: There is a process that the media uses on politicians called “fact check.” What they mean by this is that a politician makes a statement and the media (at least some of them, depending on whether they are a Democrat or Republican) will look at the actual facts of the proposal discussed by the politician and make sure they are telling the truth. The sad thing about most politicians is that they are so focused on getting elected or re-elected that they will say anything to gain votes. They will usually say what they think the people want to hear whether there is truth in their statement or not. What eventually happens is that the people come to realize they voted for something that was not true. There is not a better example of this than the current elected President of the United States, Barak Hussein Obama. We have come to know that we have trusted in lying words.

It is no coincident that our text says exactly that very thing. **Jeremiah 7:8 (KJV)** Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. One of the problems with Israel is that they had another source of words that did not line up with what God said. Two times in this chapter God suggests that they have and are trusting in “lying words” (see **Jeremiah 7:4, 8; 29:23; Isaiah 32:7; 59:13**). Folks we live in a time when the Bible has been changed into things that are not true. Just one example because this is not our objective this morning. Go with me to **John 1:1 (KJV)** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Do you know what the Jehovah’s (false) Witness Bible says? The phrase “...and the Word was God” is changed by the JW’s Bible (The New World Translation) to “...the Word was a god.” If you look at ; **John 1:18 (KJV)** No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*. Now let me tell you what the NWT says, “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten god...” Did you know that is exactly what the NASB says, “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God...” Do you know what that is? It is first class heresy. God was never “begotten” He is eternal, He has always existed. This is akin to saying that Mary was the mother of god. Can we believe that the church today is trusting in “lying words?” I think so. That is part and parcel of why the Christians today are not committed to the things of God. They have words that lie to them and do not tell them the truth.

Now, after that rabbit trail, let’s look at the context in which this chapter takes place. I have brought this us at the beginning of our series on Jeremiah. This prophecy of **Jeremiah 7-8:3** takes place during the great revival led by King Josiah. We read about it in **2Kings 22:1-7; 23:21-23; 2Chronicles 34:8-13; 35:1-19**. I want us to look at some of this history. We find Josiah making a covenant with God and dedicating the people to the Lord and he had the words of the covenant read to the people (**Jeremiah 23:3**). The Temple was repaired and the evil priests and prophets were removed as well as the Sodomites. Then

Josiah had the people observe the Passover and **Jeremiah 23:21-23** describes the way this Passover was understood.

The sad thing about all of this is that in the midst of the repairing of the Temple, the observance of one of the greatest Passover Feasts ever, the people had not changed. There was no evident transformation of their life. Their religion had done very little to improve their spiritual life. It had done nothing to enhance their relationship with God. It had done nothing to help their relationship with their fellow man better. This is all found in the prophecy of Jeremiah. Things were so bad God gave some fascinating instructions to Jeremiah in **Jeremiah 7:16 (KJV)** *Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee.* Have you ever thought that God would give a prohibition of praying for someone or some people? The prayer would not be heard by God. It would be a terrible thing to get to a place where God would not want anyone praying for you. This is an indication that the evil and sinfulness of the people of Judah had reached a level that was akin to that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Let's examine this prophecy and see if there are not some lessons to be learned. Please note with me:

1. THE EMPTY WORSHIP OF THE PEOPLE, Jeremiah 7:4-7. Note the indictment by God on the people in **Jeremiah 7:4 (KJV)** *Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these.* What do you think this means? Well think of the historical setting we just discussed in the revival led by King Josiah. The people had seen the Temple restored and repaired. The images of the false gods were removed and the Passover was observed. One of the greatest Passover Feasts ever. Yet God says to the people, **Jeremiah 7:4 (KJV)** *Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these.* The people saw the Temple as a structure that was evidence that they were religious but had little substance to their relationship with God. The statement, "The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD..." suggests that they saw safety from their enemies by the restoration of the Temple. They never considered that the Temple was the place where the presence of Jehovah was manifest. If you will look again at **Jeremiah 7:5-7** you will see what demonstrates a presence of the LORD. That was a changed behavior. Looking at these verses brings out one evident characteristic of behavior that demonstrates that one is in harmony with the LORD. **Jeremiah 7:5**, *"For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings..."* If one's relationship with God does make an alteration in one's lifestyle then there is very little evidence that one has a relationship with God. DO YOU KNOW HOW THAT IS DEMONSTRATED? Look at **Jeremiah 7:5-7 (KJV)** ⁵ *For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour;* ⁶ *If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt:* ⁷ **Then** will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. The people had thought safety was

found in the Temple but they missed one important part. Safety was found in their relationship with the one who dwelt in the Temple, The LORD God. When that relationship was restored then the way it was demonstrated was how they treated their fellow man. Look closely at **Jeremiah 7:6 (KJV)** *If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt:* There is a New Testament verse that sheds a lot of light on what is going on here. **James 1:27 (KJV)** *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.* Two things are shown here that demonstrate that one is walking with God. **(1)** Visit the fatherless and widows; **(2)** keep himself unspotted from the world. You and I will never have much of a claim to our relationship with God until at least these two things begin to be manifest in our lives. **“Failure to obey truth is infinitely worse than no knowledge of the truth, for such disobedience reacts upon heart and soul and conscience”** (G. Campbell Morgan, *Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah*, page 58). LISTEN, safety is not found in that your name is on the rolls of some church or that you attend church occasionally, or that you read your Bible every once in a while or that you give a little money occasionally. Safety is found in the changed behavior. A genuine demonstration that there has been a true conversion experience. It is my conviction that if people who claim to be Christian were to begin to follow the dictates of the Word of God some businesses would have to close. What if everyone who claimed to be Christian stopped drinking beer and whisky? What if everyone who claimed to be Christian honored the marriage vows as found in the Bible? What if everyone who claimed to be Christian helped the widows and fatherless? HERE IS A PRINCIPLE: WORSHIP WITHOUT THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS EMPTY AND WORTHLESS.

- 2. THE EVIL WAYS OF THE PEOPLE, Jeremiah 7:8-11.** When the worship is simply a ritual or going through the motions just to fulfill your obligation and there is no change in your behavior then there is something wrong. The people were *very religious* but their lifestyle was contrary to what the Bible said it should be. Note how this section of the prophecy begins, **Jeremiah 7:8 (KJV)** *Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit.* If you get your spiritual food from the TV then you are dining at the “Spiritual Fast Food” diner. Do you know why people want to get their spiritual education from the Television? It is because they do not want the “strong meat of the word” found in places like Victory Baptist Church. They want to feel good so they can go and live as they want to and never have to worry about what God thinks about their behavior. Look at the rest of this section of the prophecy. **Jeremiah 7:9-11 (KJV)** *Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; ¹⁰ And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? ¹¹ Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den*

of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen *it*, saith the LORD. You may say, “Well I don’t kill people, or commit adultery or swear falsely.” What about the fact that you mislead the government about your ability to work and get on Social Security? What about when you assassinate the character of someone? What about the fact that you are living with someone you are not married to? The people thought that when they burned incense to Baal they were worshipping God. Look at **Jeremiah 7:18-19 (KJV)** ¹⁸ The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead *their* dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger. ¹⁹ Do they provoke me to anger? saith the LORD: *do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces?* Something is wrong with the people who substitute externals for internal conviction and commitment. The indictment in **Jeremiah 7:9 (KJV)** *Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not;* is telling. Did not Jesus condemn the Jewish leaders in the Temple of the same crime? Look at **Matthew 21:13 (KJV)** *And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.* **Mark 11:17 (KJV)** *And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves.* What goes on in your Temple? What condition is your Temple? You say well what do you mean. Look at **1 Corinthians 6:19 (KJV)** *What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?* What goes on in your Temple? What goes into your Temple? Note what God says He will do with those who misuse the place of God’s dwelling. **Jeremiah 7:12-14 (KJV)** ¹² *But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel.* ¹³ *And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not;* ¹⁴ *Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh.* The Tabernacle was in Shiloh and the people used it as a “safety net” against the Philistines and their enemy defeated them and stole the Ark of the Covenant. God no longer used Shiloh as the place for His dwelling place. When the Ark of the LORD was returned from the captivity of the Philistines it was placed in the house of Abinadab in Kirgath-jearim. God no longer considered Shiloh as the place where His presence was manifest.

- 3. THE EVICTION OF THE PEOPLE BY GOD, Jeremiah 7:12-16.** This is an account of what was going to happen to the people historically. The spiritual condition of the people was so bad that the LORD told Jeremiah not to pray for these people. They are like the condemned murderer on “death row.”

There is no hope for them. God is going to remove the Temple, the people and the nation for their disobedience and idolatry.

- 4. THE ERRANT WORDS OF THE PEOPLE, Jeremiah 7:1-2, 4, 8, 23-24, 28; 8:9.** This is a conclusion that we need to consider. God wants the people to understand that by their words they are condemned. They are admonished to “Hear the word of the LORD” (**Jeremiah 7:2**). Look at **Jeremiah 7:23-24 (KJV) 23** But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. **24** But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels *and* in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward. Look at **Jeremiah 7:28 (KJV)** But thou shalt say unto them, This *is* a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the LORD their God, nor receiveth correction: **truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth.** It is not as much a problem with the new translations as it is with believers not wanting anything to do with what God has said.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 (KJV) ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; ⁴ And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.