

Jeremiah 2

part 3

Chapter 2 continues with Israel's spiritual adultery rebuked. Even in her rebellion there is a self-righteousness manifest in her attitude. In any nation that is given over to evil and immorality, there are citizens who are opposed to the direction but the evil of their leaders leads not only to the nation's destruction but the destruction of the innocent.

ISRAEL'S PURSUIT OF FALSE GODS

20 For of old time I have broken thy yoke, and burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot.

God broke the yoke of Israel's Egyptian bondage and Israel, in response, said they would do whatever God asked of them.

Deuteronomy 5:27 Go thou near, and hear all that the LORD our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it.

In reality, Israel continually went after false gods committing spiritual prostitution.

What was needed!

Deuteronomy 10:16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.

What was done! Following after idols.

Ezekiel 14:

2 And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,
 3 Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?
 4 Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols;
 5 That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols.
 6 Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.
 7 For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the LORD will answer him by myself:
 8 And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

God is not looking for perfection, He is looking for faithfulness!

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

21 Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?

Israel had been planted by God ("a noble vine") but became degenerate and a vine not recognized by God.

Isaiah 5:1 Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:

2 And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

- 3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.
- 4 What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?
- 5 And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down:
- 6 And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.
- 7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.

22 For though thou wash thee with nitre [lye], and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord GOD.

The efforts of man to clean himself spiritually is a futile endeavor.

"marked" כָּתַם kaw-tham' to carve or engrave, i.e. (by implication) to inscribe indelibly: mark.

Our sin problem: Isaiah 1:18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Our sin remedy: Isaiah 53:11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

23 How canst thou say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim? see thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done: thou art a swift dromedary traversing her ways;
24 A wild ass used to the wilderness, that snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure; in her occasion who can turn her away? all they that seek her will not weary themselves; in her month they shall find her.

Vs. 23 The people denied they had a sin problem, even though they were running after false gods.

Vs. 24 As a wild donkey sniffs at the wind to find satisfaction, so Israel does the same running after false gods.

"...Israel now has the conscience of a brute beast, which leads to the most degrading image yet in this oracle; Israel is not just an unfaithful bride, not just a prostitute without morals, not just a corrupt, wild vine. No! She is a lust-driven, brute beast, always on the move, always looking for mates, always available. She is no better than a female animal in heat - such is her insatiable appetite for idolatry."

The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Jeremiah-Ezekiel, page 96

Romans 1:21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:

27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

25 Withhold thy foot from being unshod, and thy throat from thirst: but thou saidst, There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.

Vs. 25 Jeremiah pleads with Israel not to run after false gods. Israel's response was there is no hope, so I will commit fornication with whomever I choose.

The absence of a belief in God will always lead to immorality, debauchery, and unbridled lust. Atheists, though, argue that the belief in no God does not exclude a moral compass. In fact, they would argue that atheism produces a more logical morality.

"In the end, the morality of the philosophers enjoys much more sense and consensus than the morality of the priesthood. Philosophical morality is, ironically, more objective because it follows a transparent and logical process. While faith-based morality is subjective, because it derives from authority – the authority of questionable, ambiguous, and conflicting sources, and the authority of those who claim to be the interpreters of those sources." Steven Novella, *Does Atheism Lead to Immorality?*, neurologicablog

This is false and borne out by history. Even some atheists recognize the importance of religion.

"'Atheists in Praise of Christianity?' by Jonathon Van Maren was published in May of this year about atheist and Historian Tom Holland's new book, "Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World" Holland now refers to himself as a Christian atheist. He is not convinced about the existence of God, but he has changed his mind on Christianity. Maren explains:

How did we get from there to here? It was Christianity, Holland writes. Christianity revolutionized sex and marriage, demanding that men control themselves and prohibiting all forms of rape. Christianity confined sexuality within monogamy. (It is ironic, Holland notes, that these are now the very standards for which Christianity is derided.) Christianity elevated women. In short, Christianity utterly transformed the world."

In fact, Holland points out that without Christianity, the Western world would not exist."
The Crux, e-letter of MidWest Christian Outreach, September 2020

26 As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets,

The hidden sins of people bring shame when they are uncovered for all to see. The entire nation of Israel will be ashamed when God reveals their sins.

27 Saying to a stock, Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned their back unto me, and not their face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us.

Israel has turned to idols of wood and stone as their creator and god. But, in time of trouble they will call on Jehovah, realizing the worthlessness of their idols.

28 But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble: for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah.

29 Wherefore will ye plead with me? ye all have transgressed against me, saith the LORD.

30 In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction: your own sword hath devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion.

Vs. 28 Judah, mentioned by name for the first time in this book, are asked where the gods they have been worshiping are in their time of need.

Vs. 29 Judah is asked why at this time are they coming to Jehovah.

Vs. 30 Even in His discipline they did not listen but have killed God's prophets.

2 Chronicles 36:

- 14 Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem.
- 15 And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place:
- 16 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.

A believer will be disciplined by God when he sins. The three stages of discipline are:

- Conviction "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9
- Chastisement "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.
If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?
But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." Hebrews 12:6-8
- Casket "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.
All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death." 1 John 5:16-17

When Nations Collapse

Bill Muehlenberg

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One common theme that emerges from those who have thought carefully about the decline of nations is that often it is the case that they collapse from within, instead of perishing from without. Thus Arnold Toynbee could rightly say, "Civilizations die from suicide, not murder."

Toynbee, a British historian (1889-1975), is most famous for his magisterial *A Study of History*, 1934-1961. In this 12-volume work he examined the rise and fall of nations.

One of his more significant remarks is worth recalling: "Of the twenty-two civilizations that have appeared in history, nineteen of them collapsed when they reached the moral state the United States is in now." Given that this is now a dated comment, how much more true is it today?

Other historians have of course remarked on the suicidal tendencies of nations. Will Durant (1885-1981), an American historian, made this observation: "A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself within. The essential causes of Rome's decline lay in her people, her morals, her class struggle, her failing trade, her bureaucratic despotism, her stifling taxes, her consuming wars."

Lord Macaulay (1800-1859), the English writer and historian, made a similar observation about the fate of democracies. He said that the average age of the world's greatest democratic nations has been 200 years. Each has been through the following sequence:

From bondage to spiritual faith.

From faith to great courage.

From courage to liberty.

From liberty to abundance.

From abundance to complacency.

From complacency to selfishness.

From selfishness to apathy.

From apathy to dependency.

And from dependency back again into bondage.

(A letter from Lord Macaulay to an American friend, May 23, 1857)

It is not hard to pinpoint where we are on Macaulay's timeline. The examples of corruption, selfishness, apathy and decadence are all around. The easiest way to make this case is simply to open the daily newspaper. Recent newspaper headlines readily make the case.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1927-2003) wrote an important essay by this title in 1993. In it he decried the moral collapse in the West, and the way we try to cope with it. He wrote: "The amount of deviant behavior in American society has increased beyond the levels the community can 'afford to recognize' and that, accordingly, we have been redefining deviancy so as to exempt much conduct previously stigmatized, and also quietly raising the 'normal' level in categories where behavior is now abnormal by any earlier standard."

He rightly noted that the saturation of evil is becoming so complete that the only way we can cope is to redefine it. Of course such attempts are not new. Twenty-five hundred years ago the prophet Isaiah could warn of similar calumny: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." (Isaiah 5:20)

How did this happen?

There is a long answer which we cannot go into here. We could look at the Enlightenment and its impact. Or more recently, the counter-culture of the sixties. But we can provide a short answer: The past century has been one grand social experiment to see what life is like when we reject God. (And the results are in!)

We have tried to live as if there is no God, and we are now reaping the whirlwind.

One modern prophet who shares this view is the former Russian gulag prisoner, Alexander Solzhenitsyn. He has written much on this theme. His assessment is simple yet profound: "It is because we have forgotten God. That is why all this is happening to us."

Our moral decline is directly connected to our rejection of God. Will Durant offered this insight: "There is no significant example in history, before our time, of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion."

Another important voice in this regard is TS Eliot (1888-1965). The American-British poet and critic wrote an important volume in 1948 entitled, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. His thoughts are well worth recalling:

"If Christianity goes, the whole of our culture goes. Then you must start painfully again, and you cannot put on a new culture ready made. You must wait for the grass to grow to feed the sheep to give the wool out of which your new coat will be made. You must pass through many centuries of barbarism. We should not live to see the new culture, nor would our great-great-great-grandchildren: and if we did, not one of us would be happy in it."

Exactly. Throw out God, and the work of civilization becomes very difficult indeed. Again, Will Durant concurs: "From barbarism to civilization requires a century; from civilization to barbarism needs but a day."

ISRAEL'S SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

- 31 O generation, see ye the word of the LORD. Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee?**
- 32 Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number.**
- 33 Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love? therefore hast thou also taught the wicked ones thy ways.**
- 34 Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents: I have not found it by secret search, but upon all these.**
- 35 Yet thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me. Behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned.**
- 36 Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way? thou also shalt be ashamed of Egypt, as thou wast ashamed of Assyria.**
- 37 Yea, thou shalt go forth from him, and thine hands upon thine head: for the LORD hath rejected thy confidences, and thou shalt not prosper in them.**

Vs. 31 Israel is called to "see the word of the LORD" that God has always provided for them. Yet, they refuse to return back to the LORD.

Vs. 32 It is amazing that Israel has forsaken her God.

Vs. 33 Israel has done all she could to beautify herself to find love.

Vs. 34 The sins of the nation have caused injustice for the innocent.

Vs. 35 Even in her sin, Israel claims to be okay.

Vs. 36 "Gaddest" - to move restlessly or aimlessly from one place to another. There is shame in every way Israel turns.

Vs. 37 Israel will be confounded as a result of her actions.

ISRAEL'S SPIRITUAL ADULTERY

- 3:1 They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD.**
- 2 Lift up thine eyes unto the high places, and see where thou hast not been lien [lain] with. In the ways hast thou sat for them, as the Arabian in the wilderness; and thou hast polluted the land with thy whoredoms and with thy wickedness.**
- 3 Therefore the showers have been withholden, and there hath been no latter rain; and thou hadst a whore's forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed.**
- 4 Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou art the guide of my youth?**
- 5 Will he reserve his anger for ever? will he keep it to the end? Behold, thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldst.**

Vs. 1 Israel's sins have turned her into a spiritual whore.

Vs. 1 Yet, God still is willing to receive her if they come to Him.

Vs. 2 Look and recognize your sin.

Vs. 3 God's blessings have been withheld, Israel has not been ashamed, yet God still calls for her to return to Him.

Vs. 4 Return to God, Israel!

Vs. 5 God's anger and judgment won't be held back for ever.

Vs. 5 Israel has "made her bed" and will lie in it.

These verses sum up the preceding chapter. Israel has become a spiritual whore, recognize your sin and turn back to God. His judgment won't be withheld forever.