

SUBJECT: APOSTASY
TITLE: PERPETUAL BACKSLIDING
TEXT: JEREMIAH 8:4-7; 2:19-23;

INTRODUCTION. The story of Israel in the Old Testament is a story of perpetual backsliding. Some will prefer the more theological sounding word, Apostasy. The word Apostasy has one advantage in portraying this sin which is condemned so strongly by the Lord. The very word backsliding may carry the idea of unintentional error. It may convey the idea that one is guilty, but not grossly so. The word may imply a casual slip-up. The word Apostasy holds to intentional rebellion against God. These people knew what they Lord expected of them, but with their eyes wide open chose to disobey Him. They refused to follow Him.

In this series from the Book of Jeremiah, AMERICA IN JEREMIAH, or JEREMIAH'S AMERICA, we are drawing parallels between ancient Israel and modern day America. Unless otherwise indicated, the Scripture will be from the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

I. GOD CHARGED ANCIENT ISRAEL WITH PERPETUAL BACKSLIDING, 8:4-7.

A. God Charges Judah With Perpetual Backsliding, 8:4-5a.

“Moreover you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD:
“Will they fall and not rise?
Will one turn away and not return?
Why has this people slidden back,
Jerusalem, in a perpetual backsliding?
–Jer. 8:4-5a, NKJV

B. God Graphically Describes Their Backsliding, 2:19-22a (HCSB).

“Your own evil will discipline you; your own apostasies will reprimand you. Think it over and see how evil and bitter it is for you to abandon the Lord your God and to have no fear of Me. [This is] the declaration of the Lord God of Hosts” (2:19).

Their perpetual backsliding cannot be brushed off as ignorance, bad decisions, or just following the crowd (or the culture). They are guilty of deliberate rebellion, of refusing to follow the Lord, of evil. We have God's word on this: The issue is not ignorance but iniquity. Do not take the word iniquity lightly. David confessed sin - that is missing the mark. He confessed transgression - that is crossing the line with your eyes wide open. He confessed iniquity - that is the state of one whose life has become twisted and warped by his sins and transgression.

“For long ago I broke your yoke; I tore off your fetters. You insisted: I will not serve! On every high hill and under every leafy tree you lie down [like] a prostitute” (2:20).

First, these people, the Chosen People, insisted, “I will not serve!” This is open rebellion against

Almighty God. Second, they are guilty of idolatry, rejecting the true God for false gods. This is seen as spiritual adultery in the Old Testament.

“I planted you, a choice vine from the very best seed. How then could you turn into a degenerate, foreign vine?” (2:21).

God chose Israel, and planted them in His vineyard as a choice vine. They did not deserve God’s choice. They were chosen and planted a choice vine through the grace of our sovereign God. When we sing AMAZING GRACE, we are confessing that we were once lost in sin, totally depraved, alienated from God, and helpless to do anything about it. We are not saved through our merit but by the grace of God. Israel had turned herself into “a degenerate, foreign vine.”

“Even if you wash with lye and use a great amount of soap, the stain of your guilt is still in front of Me” (2:22a).

This apostate, degenerate vine is far beyond helping itself. You cannot cleanse yourself from sin. You cannot wash yourself of to get rid of sin. You must be washed in the blood - as offensive as many modern church members find this concept.

C. God Indicted Judah for Refusing to Learn From His Dealings with Israel, 3:6-11.

“The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot” (3:6).

There was no one in all Judah who could plead ignorance of the apostasies of which Israel, the Northern Ten Tribes, had been guilty. There was no one in all Judah who did not know that God had destroyed the Northern Kingdom for their perpetual backsliding. One hundred years earlier, Isaiah and Micah had written, warning Judah that God would judge them if they followed in the paths of Israel. In fact, they not only had the Law, the first five books of the Bible, they had the writings of four great Eighth Century B. C. Prophets, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. Now God had sent His servant Jeremiah before the people with a clear and unmistakable warning:

“And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it” (2:7).

Israel refused to return to the Lord and He sent the ruthless Assyrians into the land to conquer the nation and disperse the people. Judah well understood what had happened when Sargon II swept down upon the land of Israel and utterly defeated the army and destroyed the nation in 722 B.

C. Judah knew how God had judged Israel, their sister nation, yet they refused to follow Him..

“And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also. And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks” (3:8-9).

Israel is seen as the bride of the Lord, married to Yahweh, in the Old Testament just as the church is revealed as the bride of Christ in the New Testament. Israel had committed spiritual adultery and God had given them a bill of divorce. Though she knew well the idolatrous rebellion of backsliding Israel, treacherous Judah, (1) feared not and, (2) went and played the harlot also. There is no way she can plead ignorance.

“And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD. And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah” (3:10-11).

Let's face it, those people must have really been stupid! They had the Word of the living God. They had the Ten Commandments. They had the Books of History. They had the Psalms of David and other hymn writers. They had the Wisdom literature of Solomon and others. They had the clear warning of the four great Eighth Century prophets. Now they had the word of God announce by Jeremiah. And they still refused to repent! Aren't you glad America is too modern, sophisticated, wise, and religious to persist in backsliding today? Are you not relieved that we are a lot smarter than those people? Well, let's think about that a minute.

II. AMERICA WAS FOUNDED ON CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES.

A. The Founders Testified to That Fact.

Before the history books were re-written, every child learned this basic fact in grade school. I know there are a lot of modern day educators, politician, and think-tank liberals who deny this fact. They site books, quote experts, and write prolifically about the separation of church and state. They attack those who seeks to honor God in and through any public office or institution. Former Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore has a brand new book out, *SO HELP ME GOD*, published by Broadman and Holman which deals with his own experience in being forced out as Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court.

Time nor space will permit a thorough discussion of the claim I have just made, but let me assure you that we still have the writing of the Founding Fathers and there is no mistaking what they had in mind in the founding documents. If you doubt that please check with David Barton and the *WALL BUILDERS*. David Barton has an incredible collection of documents and books written by the founders. To underscore the importance of this, are you aware of the fact that modern historians have deleted part of George Washington's Farewell Address? These brilliant scholars have purged the record of any memory of God!

B. America Today Is an Apostate Nation.

In 1962 and 1963, prayer and Bible reading were taken out of public schools. William Bennett and many others have made a strong case for the decline of our culture from that time until the end of the Twentieth Century. During the 18th and 19th centuries, God used America to provide a secure place for persecuted peoples from all over the world. They came from England and

Holland looking for religious freedom. They came from Ireland and Germany, Italy and Spain, looking for an opportunity to work and provide for their families - and they were blessed with religious freedom. They came from France and the Scandinavian countries looking for land - and they found religious freedom.

During the First Century, there was a westward movement of the kingdom of God - from Jerusalem to Antioch; from Antioch to Ephesus; from Ephesus to Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth; from Corinth to Rome. As the centuries passed, the church entered an unholy marriage with the state and the church stagnated and entered the Dark Ages, to flounder in darkness until the Reformation. Since that time the center for the spread of the Gospel moved on to Germany, France, and England. Finally, it moved to America where the Gospel saw greater success than at any time since the first two centuries.

Churches were planted all over the new world. Of the first 126 colleges founded in America, I believe something like 125 were founded as Christian colleges. Mission societies were established. Ann and Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice began a mission movement that has become the greatest mission endeavor in the history of the world. The Cooperative Program, established by Southern Baptists in 1925, became the greatest program for support of missions the world has ever known. In 2004, Southern Baptists gave over \$150 million to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering to support International Missions and \$55 million to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American missions. These are two special offerings given in addition to the Cooperative Program gifts. In 2004, Broadman and Holman founded a new Bible Society (and it was my distinct privilege to cast a vote for this new Bible Society).

When I was a senior in high school there were ten or eleven million Southern Baptists; today there are 16.3 million. I sat with other trustees at LifeWay in Nashville and listened to Southern Baptist Convention President Bobby Welch challenge Southern Baptists to win and baptize one million people in one year.

This certainly does not sound like a backslidden nation, does it? Well, to be perfectly honest, even with some positive reports, we are losing this nation to Satan. That which our forefathers condemned in the strongest terms Americans now openly pursue as entertainment. Vile language and images which our forefathers would have fought to keep out of their homes is now welcomed, even by many Christians into their homes. Church members are becoming addicted to pornography at an unprecedented rate. The media is waging a relentless war against Christianity. It is disturbing when we see many university professors actively opposing Christ and ridiculing Christians.

Where is the church? Sadly, while all this is going on, many of those specifically called by God to feed His sheep are in reality starving the sheep, dumbing down sermons and Sunday School lessons. Let's face it, the people who profess to have the Kingdom of God in their heart refuse to live in the heart of the kingdom. In fact, they have lived on the borderline so long that they look like the people on the other side, the sound like them, and some even smell like them. Many professing Christians can hardly be distinguished from lost people.

The ACLU is waging an unholy war against God in America today. The suit against Chief

Justice Moore is but one example. They have intimidated public officials into removing nativity scenes while protecting Islamic symbols.

Evolution is taught in colleges, universities, and high schools across this land. Evolution defies God, rejects scientific evidence, and deceives even many Christians. Let me remind you of something I have stated a number of times. If you want to sell people on abortion, euthanasia, or homosexuality, sell them first on evolution. While all evolutionists will never subscribe to these things, if you can sell people on evolution, some of those people are set up to accept these ungodly sins. If you do not have God at the beginning, you do not expect to find Him at the end. If there is no Creator, there can be no eternal Judge.

What has been the response of the church to this apostasy? The church has ordained homosexuals, substituted fad for truth, confused activity for action, and emotion for sanctification. Instead of demanding, "Where is God?" when there is a disaster, ask, "Where is the church?" That is God's answer to the challenges of the world. The story is told of a bishop who stood with a village priest admiring an ornate new church. The bishop said, "No more do we have to say, 'gold and silver have we none!'" To which the village priest said, "And no more can we say, 'Rise, take up thy bed and walk.'"

Where is the church? In too many cases, it has blended itself into the world. How long has it been since the church as a whole has stood up against beverage alcohol? Sunday entertainment and work? Pornography? Indecent movies and television programs? Don't kid yourself, though Don Wildmon and the American Family Association may take a stand, the church as a whole maintains its silence. I preached a revival in Mississippi a number of years ago and the pastor told me that some of their members worked in a casino in Tunica, so it might be better if I didn't mention gambling. Gambling is a vile, evil industry that preys primarily upon those who can least afford it. God has spoken, how can we remain silent?

Where is the church? The church has camouflaged itself behind the cloak of the social gospel, or put on blinders and pretended that it should only concerned itself with religious things. The world has mocked the church and the church has run for cover. I thank God for all the exceptions, for every church that does take a stand. I am not condemning those churches that are standing up for God; I am condemning those churches that have substituted some other authority for the Word of God.

III. LET US DRAW SOME PARALLELS BETWEEN ANCIENT JUDAH AND AMERICA.

A. Consider the Following Description of a Nation in a State of Perpetual Backsliding.

Let me read one person's account of a nation in a state of apostasy, a nation guilty of perpetual backsliding. See how closely the author describes the nation, and how closely he comes to prescribing a solution. This author writes:

There has never before been so much preaching, but what of the effect? From all directions

there are complaints that the ministry has lost its power and its convicting edge ... The preaching is scholarly, interesting and educational but there is little anointing and convicting in it. Consciences are not pricked as in the days gone by, and old phrases of long ago - such as conviction, conversion, repentance, adoption, dying to sin, self-loathing, its - have become alien and meaningless, while the old experiences that came out of these phrases have become (fossilized) and without life.

And the result? Family worship is quickly disappearing ... The Sunday School is just holding its own. Congregations in many places are lessening. Keeping the Sabbath has become a matter of debate and the prayer meeting is nearly extinct ... The authority of the Bible and the foundational truths of Christianity are being judged in the court of reason and criticism ... Unshakable belief in the unseen, the miraculous and the supernatural is questioned openly. Temperance is not as prosperous as it used to be, with the curse of drink rearing its head in town and countryside ... The desire for pleasure has totally captivated the age...

But what is the answer? There is no argument about this. If there is such a thing as truth between the covers of the word of God - here it is. The Spirit of God is the only source of spiritual life. There is no way to produce or revive this life other than by the instrumentality of the Spirit. "Not by might and not by power but by my Spirit," says the Lord of hosts." It is not man's fault and not God's will that there isn't the same unction and authority in the preaching of the gospel in this generation...

Reader! Will you do your part in this blessed work? Will you give yourself fully to this cause? Morning, midday, and night? Will you do your best jointly to work with others so that you can create circles of intercession? Great is your privilege - great too is your responsibility. "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down..."

...Take note, if this was to be my last message to my fellow country men throughout the length and breadth of (this land) before I am taken to the judgment it would remain thus - the greatest need of my dear nation and country at this time is spiritual revival through a specific outpouring of the holy Spirit.

Now, let me ask you a question? While I was reading this description of a nation in desperate need of revival, did you sense that this nation is caught up in a state of perpetual backsliding? Let me ask another question - could you relate this to America today? While I am at it, can you see a parallel between this description of a nation in rebellion against God and ancient Israel?

Well, let me set the record straight. What I just read was written over one hundred years ago. It was written about the nation of Wales. The quote is from a new Broadman and Holman book by Kevin Adams, A DIARY OF REVIVAL, The OUTBREAK of the 1904 WELCH AWAKENING. The author not only had a great burden for his county, he believed he knew the answer. Listen to his thoughts on the subject:

What is Wales' greatest need? Some point to the need of political reform ... A better educated ministry? A better health service and social service, all things which are important. But are any

of these the main need of Wales at this time? In my estimation there is a greater need than all these, something that will reach into the soul of a nation, something that will create a greater effect than all of them, something more lasting in its fruit and all encompassing in its blessing spiritual and temporal. Spiritual revival, not reformation but revival. And I don't mean local missions either; rather I'm speaking about the need for a high tide of Spirit flooding over the whole country that will touch all classes with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This surely is Wales' greatest need at this time.

The need for revival in Wales was critical. But if the people could not produce a revival - and they couldn't - where could they look for that revival? We know the answer to that one, and there is nothing new about it. We read about it in 2 Chron. 7:14.

I hope you are wondering what happened. Well, the author made the bold statement that it was into this Wales that Evan Roberts was born. God called a young man from the coal mines and sent him throughout the land proclaiming the Word of God. God took young Evan Roberts and flooded Wales with revival. For the next one hundred years evangelists would be calling upon God to send a modern revival like the revival He sent to Wales. I have two new books from Broadman and Holman which celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the Welch revival. Now, I am going to make a bold statement, but it is a statement I believe with all my heart. Here it is: When we meet God's demands for revival as the people of Wales did, God will send a revival in our day. Why do I say that? First, God's mighty arm has not been shortened. Second, His desire to see people saved has never diminished. Third, His desire to see His redeemed people live holy lives and carry out His Great Commission has not diminished. He has a great desire to see His church glorify His name. Jesus desires a bride without spot of blemish.

C. Let Us Now Look at Some of the Characteristics of a Backslider.

It is time for us now to ask the logical questions: Has America really become an apostate, backslidden nation? How do I know if I am guilty of backsliding? What are the signs? What do we do about it? First of all, let us look at some of the characteristics of a backslider. John MacArthur, in commenting on the Book of Jude, says, "Apostate teachers advertise themselves as having the highest spiritual knowledge, but are actually attracted to the most debased levels of life. They are soulish but not truly spiritual. MacArthur offers the Profile of an Apostate, found in Jude:

1. Ungodly (v. 4).
2. Morally perverted (v. 4).
3. Deny Christ (v. 4).
4. Defile the flesh (v. 8).
5. Rebellious (v. 8).
6. Revile holy angels (v. 8).
7. Dreamers (v. 10).
8. Ignorant (v. 10).
9. Corrupted (v. 10).
10. Grumblers (v. 16).

11. Fault finders (v. 16).
12. Self seeking (v. 16).
13. Arrogant speakers (v. 16).
14. Flatterers (v. 16).
15. Mockers (v. 18).
16. Cause divisions (v. 19).
17. Worldly minded (v. 19).
18. Without the Spirit (v. 19).

Every single thing John MacArthur lists could be listed if we were preparing a similar list on being carnal rather than spiritual. Remember that lost people are dead spiritually. Backsliders are people who profess a knowledge of Jesus Christ but refuse to follow Him or obey Him. How do we know if America really is an apostate nation? Consider these facts:

1. America was established on New Testament principles.
2. God established America.
3. He established America for a reason.
4. America should never be confused with God's Chosen Nation.
5. America, however, was chosen by God to fulfill His purpose.
6. No nation has ever known such freedom as America.
7. No nation has ever protected so many people.
8. No nation has ever spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ more extensively.
9. No nation has ever been a greater missionary nation.
10. No nation has ever seen so many churches.
11. No nation has ever been so shaped by the Word of God.
12. No nation has ever been so blessed as America.
13. No Western nation has ever been governed so long by one constitution.
15. No nation has ever seen so many great Christian institutions.

Now consider God's providence in blessing America.

1. There is no way we should have won the Revolutionary War.
2. God brought up George Washington to help set the course for the future.
3. He gave us law and order.
4. He gave us a constitution.
5. He united various states into one nation - UNDER GOD.
6. He re-established us after the Civil War.
7. He gave us the victory in the First World War.
8. He gave us the victory in WW II, even though we were not prepared for war.

Now consider how America has repaid God.

1. There has been racial strife.
2. There has been strife between labor and management.
3. There is in serious trouble in America today.
4. Divorce is far too common.

5. Millions defend the right to kill unborn babies.
6. Almost 45 million unborn babies have been killed in America since Roe v. Wade.
7. Millions defend homosexuality, the sin that led God to destroy two cities.
8. God's name is being taken down from public places.
9. The Ten Commandments are removed from public places.
10. The Rev. Barry Lynn applauds the ACLU for its war against Christianity.
11. Stop and think what America has done with God's holy day.
12. Think what Americans are doing with God's holy name.
13. Think of the false gods Americans are embracing today.
14. Think of the way Americans are breaking the seventh commandment.
15. Think of the hatred millions nurture for perhaps the most godly president in a century.

The display of the Ten Commandments is removed by court action and Barry Lynn thinks it is great because he can imagine the pain of an atheist who is forced to walk by that display and see those words. Has America become an apostate, backslidden nation. The answer is yes. It breaks my heart to see how far America has slipped from the time I was in elementary school. Can you imagine a school today sending a note home asking parents if they would like to send a note permitting their children to go to a local church for the morning revival services. That happened every time the Methodist church or the Baptist church had a revival in Sledge, MS when I was growing up. I well remember my English teacher, Miss Hicks taking her first class my Junior year to tell us about going to Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center for Youth Week that summer. The theme for the week was, GOD HAS A PLAN, A PLACE, AND A PURPOSE FOR EVERY LIFE. Miss Hicks' lesson that day was, God has a plan, a place, and a purpose for every life. I was one of three students she took back to Ridgecrest the following summer.

Now for a more personal question: Am I a backslider?

1. How do you treat God's Word.
 - a. Do you read His Word?
 - b. Do you memorize it?
 - c. Do you meditate on it?
 - d. Do you apply it every day?
2. How do you treat God's name.
 - a. Do you show reverence for His name?
 - b. Do you glorify His name?
 - c. Do you treat His name casually?
 - d. Do you show reverence for His name?
3. How do you treat God's Day?
 - a. How seriously do you take worship?
 - b. Do you keep the whole day holy?
 - c. Once morning services are over, how do you keep His day holy?
4. How do you treat God's church.

- a. Do you support the entire program of your church?
 - b. Are you ever divisive?
 - c. Do you gripe and complain?
 - d. Do you spread gossip (or just listen to it!)?
 - e. Do you really love one another?
 - f. Are you a faithful steward?
5. How do you treat God's Great Commission?
- a. Do you witness to lost people?
 - b. Do you have a genuine burden for lost people?
 - c. Do you pray fervently for lost people?
 - d. Do you pray for backsliders?

CONCLUSION. Now you tell me, is America guilty of perpetual backsliding? More to the point, are you a backslider? If you will stop right now and consider the possibility that you may be a closet backslider. If so, you will want to know what to do about it. The Bible has the answer. In Jeremiah's day God demanded that the people:

1. Repent.
2. Return.
3. Reverence Him.
4. Obey Him.

That is what he expects from any backslider, every time he backslides. Read 1 John 1:9 and confess your sins and He will forgive you and restore you.

What can we do about a nation that is guilty of perpetual backsliding? The Lord has an answer for that: "And My people who are called by My name humble themselves, pray and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land" (2 Chron 7:14, HCSB).