



Reform that did not Satisfy God (Jeremiah 7:1-8:3)

A. Background

Year	Key Events	References
643-8	Probable date of Jeremiah's birth	
640	Josiah becomes king at age 8	2 Chr 34:1
628	Josiah begins reform	2 Chr 34:3
627	Jeremiah was called into ministry	Jer 1:2
622	The book of the law was discovered in the temple	2 Chr 34:8
609	Josiah was killed in the battle in Megiddo.	2 Chr 35:20ff

- Jeremiah 7-10 forms one section of his prophetic messages. Jeremiah gives a series of warnings about the judgment coming to Judah due to their sins (ch2-25). Jeremiah 7:1-8:3 has a particular focus on the reform of Judah's religious order. The key theme is 'worship'. The keyword is 'place' (7:3, 7, 12, 14, 20, 32, 8:3) - the Temple of Solomon.
- There were two godly young men, Josiah and Jeremiah, in Judah who were intensely concerned about the spiritual condition of their nation. They were both early to mid-20's. Both men had deep encounters with God at an early age of around 16 or 17, and both had fiery zeal to serve God.
 - The difference between the two young men was that Josiah had the power to impose religious reform as the king of Judah. He tried to change the nation's destiny by instituting a nationwide religious reform through wielding political power.
 - Jeremiah did not have any such privilege or power. He only had his raw voice to use on the streets of Jerusalem. He had the word of God in the power of the Spirit. But his was a lonely voice. He was mostly ridiculed or ignored by his people. One morning God spoke to Jeremiah to go to the very heart of Judah's religious centre, and cry out at the temple gate. The temple was extensively renovated during Josiah's reform, and the people of Judah took great pride in it. (c.f. Eastern Gate? C.f. 26:10; 36:10)

B. Josiah's Reform: Background (2 Chr 34:1-35:19; 2 Kings 22:14-20)

- Josiah was a godly king. He wanted to be like King David, 'a man after God's own heart.' Josiah ascended to the throne at the age of 8. He began to seek the Lord at the age of 16, and when he turned 20, he started the most comprehensive religious reform in the nation's history. Josiah personally went throughout the country, destroying the pagan altars and wooden images (phallic symbols) and the pagan priests and their prophets. He even desecrated the pagan priests' bones on their altar to cleanse the land of idolatry (C.f. 2 Chr 34:1-7; 2 King 22-23).
- When Josiah turned 26 (in the 18th year of his reign), he turned his attention to repairing the temple which was getting old and shabby. He began to cleanse the temple of all the idols from the previous kings who were wicked. His extensive renovation project for the temple employed carpenters, builders and masons (2 Chr 34:14; 2 Kg 22:6).
- As they were cleaning out the temple inside out and tossing out the rubbish from the cupboards of the temple, Hilkiah the priest found an 'old scroll' covered in dust and cobweb. By now Josiah had the Davidic worship system reinstated with the 'singers', 'songwriters' (Asaph and Jeduthun) and the 'gatekeepers' et al for many years. But they did use the word of God in worship. In fact, they got used to worshipping God without the word of God. And this resulted in the lack of true repentance

and reform on the inside, while thinking they were doing pretty well with their religious life (C.f. 2 Cor 35:4, 15). Until they rediscovered the Word of God and read it!

4. Josiah understood for the first time that his nation was actually under God's curse because they disobeyed His word. He saw that God demanded much more than repairing and extending the temple and reinstating the forgotten Davidic worship system. God wanted the transformation of their hearts. Josiah could see God's judgment falling at any moment, and he led the people of Judah in a solemn national covenant renewal ceremony. After this, he celebrated the greatest Passover ever held in Israel. He offered 30,000 lambs and goats plus 3,000 cattle of his own. The people offered their gifts on top. It was the greatest religious festival instituted by a king in the history of Israel. Many people thought they turned a corner. God's heart was deeply moved by Josiah that His hand of judgment was delayed for another generation. God would not judge Judah in Josiah's lifetime. However, when Josiah was killed in the battle of Megiddo, God's judgment swiftly came upon Judah, as if God was saying to Josiah, *'I will keep you and I will delay My judgment because you have responded rightly to Me with all your heart. But I cannot keep the whole nation the same way.'*
5. What was the problem? Josiah did his best to change the godless people, and by an act of the parliament led them to become more religious. But the act of parliament doesn't change man's heart. We could say Josiah's religious reform was the greatest revival in the history of Israel. The face of the nation changed that day as they renewed the covenant with the Lord and celebrated the Passover, but the hearts of the people remained the same.

You can spring-clean the house of worship and reinstitute the best worship system. You can even pile up thousands of animal sacrifices as if a bigger pile of animal carcasses constitutes better worship than a smaller pile. But God is not interested in these external things, said Jeremiah. True revival cannot be imposed upon the people by a state because you cannot change the people's hearts from top-down. It must happen bottom-up, one heart at a time.

C. Jeremiah's Message (Jeremiah 7:1-8:3)

1. There is no doubt Jeremiah and Josiah supported one another as contemporaries who lived only a few miles from each other. However, Jeremiah doesn't mention Josiah's reform even once when it was a major national and historical event. Why? Probably because in Jeremiah's eyes, Josiah's reform, though wildly popular, was too little and too late. Josiah had the support of the nation behind him. It was visible, spectacular and measurable. But it wasn't inward, it wasn't deep, and it wasn't permanent.

God told Jeremiah to stand at the gate of the temple and preach, *'Ritual is no substitute for righteousness. Offerings are no substitute for obedience. External religious reform is no substitute for repentance of the heart.'* His was a lonely, solitary voice at the temple gate day in and day out. In fact, this very message, also known as 'Jeremiah's temple address', started the series of increasing attacks on Jeremiah's ministry and life. But history vindicates Jeremiah as the one who had deep insight and understanding of the human heart and its real needs. This message is particularly relevant to us who live in the last days, and as Christians voting for presidents and prime ministers.

2. Judah's Present Condition (7:1-19)
 - a. The temple of Solomon was magnificently renovated by Josiah. It was a massive structure towering over the hill of ancient Jerusalem. The sight of the temple struck the pilgrims' eyes as they journeyed toward Jerusalem. They would hear, 'Go up to Jerusalem!' The beautiful temple was the pride of the city. This was what set Jerusalem apart from all other cities of the world. It was on the lips of everyone, *'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord...'* (7:4 C.f. 2 Sam 7:12ff; Ps 132:13ff).
 - b. After they renovated the temple, renewed the covenant, reinstated the Davidic worship system with the ark of the Lord inside, and celebrated the greatest Passover ever, Jeremiah prophesied,

'God will destroy this temple' in which you put your trust (v8). Jeremiah was saying to Judah, the temple has become to you 'your god', 'your fetish', 'your superstition'!

- c. Jeremiah indicted the people inside the temple, *'You have turned God's house into a den of thieves'* – a place of retreat for the thieves in between jobs (v11). Look at Shiloh, he said (v12). Shiloh is one of the few places with no visitors even today because there is nothing left in it. So, God will destroy Jerusalem just like Shiloh unless they 'amend their ways' (7:3,5) and show the fruit of repentance in their relationship with God and with each other. Otherwise, God would cast them out of His sight just like the people of Ephraim were cast out of Shiloh.
 - d. God tells Jeremiah, *'Do not pray for this people nor lift up a cry or prayer for them, nor make intercession to Me: for I will not hear you.'* (7:16) Of the enormous animal sacrifices in the temple Jeremiah says, 'God never delighted in the pile of animal carcasses coming from paganistic hearts.' (7:17-19) The people said, 'I want to worship God in the great cathedral with the beautiful choir singing with the original tune of the Tabernacle of David. I love to worship in the beautiful atmosphere.' But Jeremiah said to them, 'You have missed it altogether. Go back and check what God wanted of His people from the very beginning.'
3. What God desires from the Past (7:20-28) – Jeremiah quotes Deut 6:3 leading to 'Shema Israel.'
- a. Where is the emphasis in God's covenant with Israel? Is it on the 'sacrifice' or on 'obedience'?
'Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the LORD God of your fathers has promised you – a land flowing with milk and honey.' (7:21-23)
'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.' (Deut 6:3-5)
 - b. Jeremiah tells them, *offering and sacrifices* are secondary, *obedience and submission* to the word of God are central and primary to the covenant.
So Samuel said, 'Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.' (1 Sam 15:22 – from Samuel on King Saul)
'Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High.' (Ps. 50:13-14 - Asaph's Psalm)
'For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart – these O God, You will not despise.' (Ps 51:16-17 - David's Psalm)
 - c. God was saying through Jeremiah, 'I don't want any more offerings. I want your heart and I want repentant heart and changed life from you.' God is not impressed with all that animal meat and blood flowing on the altar if you live a life of lie in the 'den of thieves.'
4. Judah's Future (7:28-8:3) - Jerusalem is on a rising hill leading up to the temple. At the bottom of the city was a deep valley called 'Tophet', the fireplace also known as 'the valley of Hinnom.' The temple was renovated, and the Passover was celebrated not long after the sweeping 'revival'. But at the bottom of this valley, people secretly came and burned their babies to Molech. God has an intense reaction of horror at this devilish insanity, *'...to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into My heart!'* (7:31 C.f. Lev 18:21; 20:2-5) So God said, *'I am going to make this valley a valley Slaughter'*, i.e. of bloodshed. *'Even the bones of the princes, priests, and prophets will be desecrated in that valley for all that you have done, and the birds will eat the dead corpse with no one to chase them away.'* (8:1-3). How about abortion in our day?

D. Today's Application

1. Is this just for the Old Testament days? *Jesus paralleled Jeremiah's outlook and ministry more than any other prophets. Some saw Elijah in Jesus because of His power, and some saw Jeremiah in Him because of His humanity. (Matt 16:16) What did Jesus do to the temple?* It was just renovated by Herod. It was much larger than the original temple of Solomon. Massive limestones weighing up to 100 tons were being put in place. Under Herod's order, this temple was rising again more magnificent than ever. People began saying again, 'The temple, the temple, the temple...'

Jesus came into that temple with a whip and said, 'You have made My father's house a den of thieves.' You use religion as the place to escape in between your thieving jobs just to feel good about yourself. Your religion is a cloak of hypocrisy. But I can see what is going on in your hearts. You are more interested in getting money from the worshippers than worshipping Me. '*These people honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me.*' Jesus emphasised obedience over sacrifice. In fact, in obedience Jesus Himself became the sacrifice for our sins and finished the animal sacrifice system altogether.
 - a. Watch out for another temple that is going to be built in Jerusalem. The people will say again, 'The temple of the Lord!'
 - b. Judah's temple theology was impeccable. It was based on the 'covenant theology'. However, God is not after theology. No theology will provide safety from the judgment from God. What God wants from His people is the wholehearted return to God.
 - c. The sin of killing our babies through abortion particularly horrifies God. It arouses His disgust and anger. It guarantees God's judgment on any society that continues in the same pathway unless it is repented of.
2. Whenever Jesus talked about hell, He spoke of the valley of Hinnom, 'Gehenna where the fire is not quenched, and the worms do not die.' When Jesus died for our sins, He died on the hill looking down on the temple structure.
 - a. When Jesus died on that hill at 3 pm, at the time as the last animal sacrifice was offered on the day of Passover, as the final Passover Lamb, one of Jesus' own disciples named 'Judas' from Judah killed himself in that valley of Hinnom. He hung himself on a tree over the valley of Hinnom, then the rope snapped and Judas fell into this valley, headlong bursting open his intestines. The people called that field the 'field of blood' as per Jeremiah's prophecy. One of Jesus' own disciples who was involved in all the religious things for three years finished in the valley of Hinnom.
 - b. Every soul of man will finish off either with Jesus or with Judas. There is nothing in between. Unless we repent and turn to God and live the life of obedience, our future will finish the same as Judas, so-called Jesus' disciple.

Lord, give us the grace to bring you the fruit of our repentance, and not just the external religious reform. Amen.