

## Bible - General Questions

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### What Are the Cause and Consequences of Backsliding?

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Part 2 of a series

**Backsliding is a term that has largely disappeared from the Evangelical church's vocabulary, but it needs to be re-learned. The cause of backsliding, and the consequences, are the same for the Evangelical church today as they were for ancient Judah in the days of Jeremiah.**

In [part one](#) of this series, we briefly examined the life of Jeremiah and his calling by Jehovah to the ministry of a prophet. We saw that this was a man who had the fire of the message in his bones. Try as he might, he could not restrain himself from proclaiming God's twofold message of wrath against the iniquities of Judah, and the future promise of hope — restoration to the land for a remnant, and a New Covenant implemented by the promised Messiah.

#### "Perpetual Backsliding"

The major theme of Jeremiah's message from God has to do with the cause and the consequences of backsliding. This theme recurs throughout the book, but one of the places where it is stated most eloquently is in Jeremiah chapter 8, beginning at verse 4. The Lord is speaking to Jeremiah, and He says this:

"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? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return. I listened and heard, but they do not speak aright. No man repented of his wickedness, saying,

'What have I done?' Everyone turned to his own course, as the horse rushes into the battle.

"Even the stork in the heavens knows her appointed times; and the turtledove, the swift, and the swallow observe the time of their coming. But My people do not know the judgment of the Lord. "How can you say, 'We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us'? Look, the false pen of the scribe certainly works falsehood. The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken.

"Behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord; so what wisdom do they have? Therefore I will give their wives to others, and their fields to those who will inherit them; because from the least even to the greatest everyone is given to covetousness; from the prophet even to the priest everyone deals falsely. For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly [that is, superficially], saying, 'Peace, peace!' When there is no peace.

"Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; in the time of their punishment they shall be cast down," says the Lord.

### **Backsliding: Its Nature and Cause**

The people of Judah were backslidden. The word "backsliding" in the original language means apostasy, faithlessness, defection, waywardness, rebellion against the authority of God. The word in the original also carries the meaning of a resulting break in the relationship with God.

What is the cause of backsliding? It is very simple, yet very profound. We read in this passage and elsewhere that *the people had departed from the Scriptures*. The principal terms that are used in Jeremiah for the Scriptures are "the Law of the Lord" and "the Word of the Lord." In verse 8, God says to the people of Judah through Jeremiah, "How can you say that the Law of the Lord is with us, when you are listening to false

teaching?" Verse 9: "Behold, they have rejected the Word of the Lord." The cause of backsliding is a departure from the Word of God, coupled with ready acceptance of false teaching concerning the Word of God. The people of Judah had fallen into both traps of Satan.

### **The Consequences: "They Did Not Know How to Blush"**

The consequences of backsliding are a lack of shame for sin, and disaster from the hand of God. This was true in Judah, as we read beginning in verse 12: " 'Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; in the time of their punishment they shall be cast down,' says the Lord."

Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, cried out with tears for forty-one years against backsliding in Judah. Over and over again, he called their attention to the cause and consequences of their backsliding. God's message to Judah through the prophet Jeremiah was a warning of impending disaster. But the people of Judah would not listen.

### **God's Final Messenger**

Jeremiah was not the first of the prophets to speak against these things. The prophets had already been speaking against the wickedness of Israel and Judah for over 200 years by the time Jeremiah came on the scene. Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Joel, Micah, Nahum, and Zephaniah had all preceded Jeremiah as prophets of the Lord. Jeremiah's warning was God's *final* warning to Judah before His long stored-up wrath finally broke forth, and He sent the Gentile nations to destroy Jerusalem, and to carry the people of Judah off into captivity in Babylon.

As a result of preaching God's message, Jeremiah was subjected not only to constant verbal abuse, but was also at various times physically attacked and placed in stocks in a gate of the city of Jerusalem (20:1-3), placed in prison (32:1ff, 37:15ff), and let down

by a rope into a watery pit to sink and die, but was rescued although he remained a prisoner (chapter 38). And yet he kept preaching God's message.

### **Postmodern Parallels**

The Evangelical church today has, in many places, fallen into the same twin trap of the devil into which Judah fell — Biblical illiteracy leading to lack of spiritual discernment, resulting in susceptibility to false teaching and an un-blushing attitude towards sin of all kinds. In many cases Evangelical leaders, like the false prophets of old, proclaim a false peace that leads souls to destruction by comforting them in their sins. The works of "the false pen of the scribes" fill the shelves of religious bookstores.

We'll see even more parallels between conditions in ancient Judah and conditions in the postmodern Evangelical church as we explore the events that led to Jeremiah's prophetic word against the kingdom of Judah, in our [next article](#).

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