

A Choice to Be Just

IS IT EVER TOO LATE TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT?

Focal Verses • JEREMIAH 7:1-15

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will **EVALUATE** the messages of doom and hope found in Jeremiah, **REGRET** the error of our ways and resolve to change, and **ADDRESS** our unfaithfulness and our community's corruption.

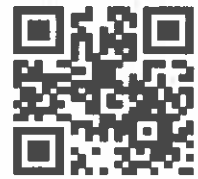
In Focus

Upon moving into his new house, Bryce quickly made friends with two of his neighbors. Bryce invited his friends to attend church with him, but they always politely declined. When the new sanctuary at his church was completed, Bryce tried once more to invite Jorge and Alonzo to church. They again told Bryce no because of things they knew about him and some of the other members. It bothered them that Bryce had contributed a lot of money toward the new building, yet his mother lived in inadequate housing and subsisted on government assistance. Another member had recently evicted a young mother from one of his rental homes following the disability of her husband. Still, others had adulterous affairs that were the gossip of the town.

Bryce went home and considered all they had said. They were right. His deeds had not matched his professed faith. He repented of his sins and resolved to change his attitude and his ways. He also resolved to talk with his fellow church members about their actions and lifestyles. He asked God to change his heart and give him the courage to lead others to change as well.

How do we respond when God convicts us of our sins? Why do you think some people struggle to change their behavior when they receive a clear word of correction?

SCAN FOR VIDEO



Keep in Mind

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place” (Jeremiah 7:3, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Jeremiah 7:1** The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,

2 Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD.

3 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place.

4 Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, are these.

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.

8 Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit.

9 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.

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.

15 And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim.

The People, Places, and Times

Shiloh. Shiloh was a place in northern Israel where the Tabernacle resided from the time of the judges until the Philistines captured it. It was located in the area allotted to the tribe of Ephraim, ten miles north of Bethel. The name Shiloh means "place of rest." Today, the evidence of Shiloh's destruction and desolation can be seen, as the land where this city once was is secluded and uninhabited.

The Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple's eastern gate in Jerusalem was most likely where Jeremiah delivered the sermon found in Jeremiah 7. This was the magnificent temple Solomon had built some 350 years earlier, where the people

worshiped and where the Ark of the Covenant, the symbolic presence of God, resided. Jerusalem had withstood many attacks over the years, and the people of Jerusalem believed that because God resided in the Temple, He would never allow His Temple or His people to fall.

Background

The occasion for Jeremiah's sermon was most likely the beginning of one of the Israelite pilgrimage festivals when great crowds of people would be pouring into the Temple courts for worship. Most scholars date the chapter 7 sermon to around 609 B.C., during the first year of the reign of King Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 26:1). This

is significant because it was over 100 years after the Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen to the Assyrians. Jeremiah frequently pointed to the fall of Israel as an example of God's judgment upon a sinful and unrepentant nation, and he repeatedly warned that Judah and Jerusalem were destined for the same fate if they did not repent. The people of Judah were well aware of Israel's fate, but they had come to believe that because they had the Temple, God would never judge them similarly. Just a few years earlier, Josiah, a godly king of Judah, had renewed the covenant with God. Hoping to restore God's blessing and avoid His judgment for the people's idolatrous acts, Josiah cleansed the temple, ordered the destruction of all idols and altars to other gods, and attempted to restore proper worship at the Temple. The people had pledged themselves to the covenant and all its laws and festivals (2 Kings 23:1–4). But after Josiah's death, as Jeremiah's sermon indicates, the people's reforms and pledges proved to be superficial. They did not change their immoral behaviors. Jeremiah's preaching fell on deaf ears and hardened hearts, and Jerusalem and Judah eventually fell to the Babylonians and went into captivity in 586 BC.

At-A-Glance

1. The Lord of the Temple (Jeremiah 7:1–4)
2. The Longing for Change (vv. 5–7)
3. The Litany of Sins (vv. 8–11)
4. The Last Warning (vv. 12–15)

In Depth

1. The Lord of the Temple (Jeremiah 7:1–4)

During the pilgrimage festivals, it would not have been unusual for pilgrims entering the Temple area to be greeted by a temple representative asking them to examine their lives

before worshiping. On this particular day, that representative is Jeremiah. But his pleas on that day have a sense of urgency about them. Beyond the usual call for repentance, Jeremiah conveys that actions of abandoning their evil ways must accompany their words of repentance. So great is God's anger against them that their privilege of staying in the land is contingent on radical and immediate amending of their immoral ways. Additionally, in verse 4, he challenges them to examine the superficial nature of their worship and their false sense of security associated with the Temple. They are convinced that God will never allow anything bad to happen to His Temple or the people who worship there. They put their faith in the Temple of the Lord instead of the Lord of the Temple.

2. The Longing for Change (Jeremiah 7:5–7)

Through His servant Jeremiah, God makes it very clear that continued blessings are conditional on the people's making drastic changes in their attitudes and actions. If the people stop their evil deeds, He will allow them to continue to live in the land and have access to the Temple. It is the people's choice to do justice and treat those around and among them with respect and honor. God's requirements of justice comprise a large part of His elaboration on the Law in Exodus 20–23. The Israelites in Jeremiah's day are openly violating God's laws of justice, yet He still offers mercy (v. 7) if they will turn from their evil ways.

3. The Litany of Sins (Jeremiah 7:8–11)

Here, God shows that He not only knows His people's evil deeds but also their corrupt view of the Temple and their worship there. The people are guilty of violating at least five of the Ten Commandments. Yet, they confidently flock to the Temple, believing their mere attendance and participation in rituals will atone for their sins. God is obviously angry both at their sins and at their attitude that temple worship gives

them indulgence to keep on sinning. He says they have turned His Temple into a “den of robbers” (Jeremiah 7:11). They were treating God’s house like a thieves’ hideout from the accountability for their sins. For the people to treat the Temple as a place of safety, where they think they are free from the consequences of their sins, is such an abomination in God’s eyes that He will rain judgment down on them.

4. The Last Warning (Jeremiah 7:12–15)

Shiloh, located north of Jerusalem in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, was an important place of worship during the time of the judges (c. 1300–1030 B.C.), as the Tabernacle was set up there for a time. The hearers of Jeremiah’s temple gate sermon know that the Tabernacle, an earlier forerunner to the Jerusalem Temple, had been destroyed in Shiloh hundreds of years before. Psalm 78:59–60 records the fate of that once sacred place of worship: “God ... was wroth ... so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh.” God would not be bound to any physical building, location, or place of worship. In 722 B.C., God gave all of Israel over to destruction and exile at the hands of the Assyrians. Jeremiah makes it very clear that unless the people of Judah amend their ways and turn from their abominations, their fate will be like that of Shiloh and Israel. The choice is theirs. The sad reality of their response is recorded later in Jeremiah’s ministry (26:8–15).

Search the Scriptures

1. What did it mean for the people of Judah to amend their ways (Jeremiah 7:3)?
2. What did the people’s chant say about their attitude toward God and their sin (vv. 4, 10)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How do our attitudes toward the church reflect those of the worshipers at the Temple?
2. What does it mean when we continue to sin against God and claim to be “safe”?

Liberating Lesson

Like the Israelites of Jeremiah’s day, each of us faces daily temptations to perpetuate injustices and commit sinful acts. We must make choices and face their consequences. This text should also inform our attitudes and practices concerning worship and redemption. Sometimes, we treat our church the way the Israelites treated their Temple. We are sometimes focused on appearances and rituals rather than the God who is supposed to be the object of our worship.

Application for Activation

Often, our attempts at repentance and reform fall short because we simply forget what God requires of us and only talk about change in a general way. To combat this tendency, write down a list of resolutions and practices that will specifically help you “thoroughly amend your ways” (Jeremiah 7:5).

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

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Say It Correctly

Shiloh. SHY-lo.
Cyrenius. CY-ren-ee-us.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 120

2 Chronicles 1–5

Psalms 49:12–20

DAY 121

2 Chronicles 6–8

Psalms 50:1–6

DAY 122

2 Chronicles 9–12

Psalms 50:7–13

DAY 123

2 Chronicles 13–17

Psalms 50:14–21

DAY 124

2 Chronicles 18–20

Psalms 50:22–23

DAY 125

2 Chronicles 21–24

Psalms 51:1–6

DAY 126

2 Chronicles 25–27

Psalms 51:7–12

Notes